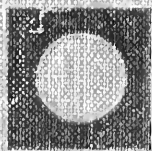


A Brigadier in France

Hanway R. Cumming



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1917-1918

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*Brigadier-General
Hanway R. Cumming D.S.O.*

A Brigadier in France

1917—1918

Hanway R. Cumming



With Introductions by

Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson, G.C.B., G.C.M.G.
and Major-General Sir David Campbell, K.C.B.

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THE Author hopes that these personal experiences may be of interest to a certain section of the public and asks their clemency for any lapses in literary style which they may possess, as he lays no claim to such proficiency. Whatever merit they may have lies in the fact that they cover a period of great interest in the war, and one wherein many lessons of omission and commission may be learnt.

Introduction

BRIGADIER-GENERAL CUMMING was one of the many officers who, after safely going through the Great War, met his death at the hands of the Sinn Feiners at the time when it was the policy of His Majesty's Government to try and restore order in Ireland by the application of military force.

His devotion to duty, regard for his men, and soldierly qualities in general were such that, had not his career been cut short in the lamentable way just mentioned, he might soon have reached the higher rank of Major-General and been given the command of a Division.

The narrative he left behind him descriptive of the doings of the brigades he commanded at different times on the West Front is an unvarnished record of achievements which reflect credit upon himself and the officers

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and men who served under him. Moreover it bears the impress of accuracy, and therefore should, within its sphere, be as useful to the military student and historian as it will be interesting to those who shared in the arduous operations described.

W. M. ROBERTSON, F.M.

December 14, 1921.

Introduction

I FIRST met Brigadier-General Hanway Robert Cumming, D.S.O., when he joined my Division to take over command of the 110th Brigade, *vice* Brigadier-General Cayley. Brigadier-General Cumming took over command on March 18, 1918, a few days before the great German Offensive started. Between that time and the Armistice on November 11, the 21st Division was probably more heavily engaged than any other Division in the British Army during the same period.

During March, the Division was in the thick of the Somme fighting, receiving a congratulatory message from the Commander-in-Chief for the work it did.

Being transferred to the Ypres sector in April it then, once more, sustained the shock of the German attacks in that section, and

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was one of the Divisions in the line when the great German attack on April 29 was definitely held up. For the work performed, it again received the congratulations of the C.-in-C.

Being transferred to Champagne in May, it took over the line on May 14, and experienced the full brunt of the German attack which was launched on May 27. Although the left flank was completely turned, and by the evening of the first day the enemy was actually occupying positions in rear of those held by our troops, all ranks fought with the greatest gallantry, and, showing the most magnificent discipline, maintained their positions in the battle zone.

During the night May 27/28, pivoting on the French, the Division formed a line at right angles to the one they were holding the previous evening, and so created a groundwork on which other Divisions of the 9th Corps, who had suffered terribly in the previous day's fighting, were able to form. The way in which the troops of the 9th Corps rallied on May 28, after the experiences they had been

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through on May 27, was, I firmly believe, as fine a performance as any enacted during the whole war, and had a very decisive effect in finally bringing the Germans to a standstill. Leaving the Champagne in June, the Division was once more in the line by July 15. On August 21 it started, with the other units of the 7th Corps, on the final great allied counter-offensive. During this period the Division received unstinted praise from its Corps Commander, Lieut.-General Sir C. D. Shute, a very hard man to satisfy, as well as congratulatory messages from the C.-in-C.

Between August 21 and November 11, the Division captured 114 officers, 3,758 other ranks, and, considering what the Division had been through during the previous months, this amply testifies to the grand spirit which pervaded all ranks. I should here like to give a small example which further testifies to this magnificent spirit.

After the Division had been heavily engaged with the enemy from early morning March 21 to the evening of March 25, during which time rest was practically an impossibility, it was

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withdrawn from the line during the night of March 25/26.

It was sent back to Bray, some six miles in rear, many of the troops not getting in till the morning of the 26th. Every one was completely worn out with physical fatigue. After forming the Division into a composite Brigade, I ordered the men to get what rest they could. At 4 p.m. orders were received that the Brigade was to move up at once to Maricourt, the place they had left the previous night, to support the 35th Division. I was positively ashamed to have to make this call on men who had just come through such a terrible experience. The sequel is interesting. I was standing with General Franks in his room when we suddenly heard the sound of troops marching, accompanied by loud singing. It was the Brigade moving out, in perfect order. General Franks turned to me and said, "By God, that's fine, they are singing." And it was.

During the whole of the fighting which I have briefly mentioned, Brigadier-General Cumming was in command of the 110th Brigade,

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and proved himself to be not only a magnificent leader of men, but also a soldier of the very highest class.

He was beloved by every one in the Brigade, and the results obtained were very largely due to his personality and the confidence he inspired in all who served under him.

Not only was he a very fine Brigadier, but on many occasions his advice to me, as his Divisional Commander, was of inestimable value.

I am sure a perusal of his book will do every layman good and will explode, once and for all, the absurd idea that the lot of generals and such like was cast in fine *chateaux* and motor-cars.

During the last eight months of the war, owing to the scarcity of trained officers, the work of brigadiers was of a most trying nature, and it was only men like General Cumming, possessed of health, strength, and indomitable will power, who could possibly have stood the strain.

I doubt if there was a Brigadier in France more universally loved by those who served

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with him, and his death has left a blank which it will be hard to fill.

DAVID M. CAMPBELL,
Major-General.

QUETTA,
November 21, 1921.

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Chapter I : *Introductory*

WHILST in temporary command of a Brigade, the real occupant of the position being away on leave, the writer received the welcome news one day that he had been appointed to command the 91st Infantry Brigade in the 7th Division and was ordered to join it forthwith. This was in November 1916, the 6th Division to which he then belonged being at Bethune, having just come out of the Battle of the Somme after the usual three turns in the fighting line, which was the general custom in that very strenuous and exhausting battle.

The 6th Division during their tour had been through some of the hardest fighting, starting from September 15 just south of Ginchy ; they had also taken part in the big attack on the 26th of the same month, when Morval and Les Bœufs were taken, a day on which a big break through seemed probable—when, from the high

ground beyond these villages, the Boche could be seen retiring in considerable confusion towards Le Transloy and the Bapaume Road. Later, during October, they came in for the operations in connection with the consolidation of the line, in which the fighting, though not so spectacular, was of a very bitter character, East of Flers and Gueudecourt. After completing their part in this operation they were taken out of the hurly-burly and sent back to an area not far from Abbeville, where they refitted and rested, and shortly afterwards were railed to Bethune, where they took over the line in the usual course. It was shortly after arriving there that the orders arrived for taking over the new Brigade.

On November 18 the Brigadier left his old Brigade with many regrets, especially as his own Battalion, the 2nd Durham Light Infantry, formed part of it, and started off in a motor-car in search of his new command. The 7th Division at that time was on the march from the North towards the familiar Somme area. Having started early and made several inquiries on the way, the Brigadier was able to trace

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them as being somewhere near Doullens. On reaching Doullens, he was lucky enough to find a Staff Officer of a Division quartered in the town who eventually discovered that the 7th Division H.Q. were in a small village West of Doullens. There he eventually found them and after a very welcome lunch with the Divisional Commander, Sir Herbert Watts as he eventually became, he pushed on to where his Brigade H.Q. were located at the small village of Villers L'Hôpital, and there was greeted by the Brigade-Major, Captain R. N. O'Connor, of the Scottish Rifles, who had been in the Brigadier's company at Sandhurst as a cadet. Young, active, full of enthusiasm, and a first-rate soldier, "Bunny" O'Connor, as he was called in the Division, was an ideal Staff Officer, and the Brigadier thought it was a fortunate omen to find him there.

The Division at that time consisted of the 20th, 22nd, and 91st Infantry Brigades, the former two being commanded by Brigadier-Generals Green and Steele. The Divisional Artillery was commanded by Brigadier-General Stanley Clarke, but this had been left in the line

and did not rejoin the Division till some time later. It was a very happy Division to join, in which every one got on very well together, which was not always the case. The H.Q. Staff were very capable and helpful and assisted in making the divisional machine go "on oiled wheels." The Divisional Commander himself was an ideal one and beloved by every one alike, from highest to lowest. The Brigadier felt that he had attained a happy stage for his first venture in a new rôle.

The day after he joined, the Division moved another stage in its march towards the line, so that he had the chance of seeing his battalions on the move and meeting the commanding officers of the several units. The Brigade consisted of the 2nd Queens, 1st S. Staffordshires, and the 21st and 22nd Manchesters, 91st Machine Gun Company and 91st Trench Mortar Battery. It was a fine body of men, and the Brigadier was well pleased with their appearance as they swung along the road past him that autumn morning, and he felt a great pride in being lucky enough to have them under his command.

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Two days later, the Brigade relieved a Brigade of the 51st (Highland) Division which had just taken the village of Beaumont Hamel, and occupied and consolidated the newly captured line which ran along the high ground just East of the village, continuing in a sort of semicircle as far as the Serre to Mailly-Maillet road, just West of the village of Serre. The line was in a very nebulous state and the relief was complicated by having to take over part of the front from the 32nd Division as well as from the 51st. Naturally enough after such a fiercely opposed attack the line was considerably disorganised, with units mixed up with one another and certain portions of the line not quite linked up. The relief was, however, carried out without a hitch and every one started to settle down and make the best of things as they were.

Brigade H.Q. started badly in a peculiarly filthy dug-out in a part of the line called the White City, a trench dug out of the chalk between the village of Beaumont Hamel and Auchonvillers. It had the great advantage of being comparatively close to the

front line, but as it poured with rain, varied by snow at intervals, from the moment of taking over, it very soon became uninhabitable from the water which penetrated through the roof and walls; added to which the smell which arose from the wet floor was appalling. It seemed to those who had to live in it that something or somebody had been buried underneath it. Under the stress of it, the Brigade H.Q. began to be affected, so much so that the Divisional Commander put his foot down and ordered them to leave it. A Brigade H.Q. was found in a little house on the outskirts of Mailly-Maillet. This was a distinct change for the better, but its disadvantage was the distance from the front line, which meant a considerable amount more riding and walking for the Brigadier and his staff. Although not everything that could be desired, it certainly made a fairly comfortable H.Q. for the winter months, where at any rate it was possible to get dry and warm after returning from the trenches, covered with mud and wet through.

The days following the relief were very busy

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ones for everybody. The new lines had to be practically reorganised, communication trenches sited and dug and everything put in order. The reconnaissance of the ground and endless questions of supply of all sorts took up all the time of the Brigade staff. Precautionary measures against trench feet was a big item, and this necessitated a proper organisation for furnishing men in the front line trenches with a regular supply of dry socks, whale oil, and hot food, a task of no small difficulty in view of the appalling state of the ground, which had been subjected to nearly two years of constant shelling, and the bad weather conditions which then prevailed and which continued incessantly. The question of trench feet was so important that the Brigadier started a competition between his battalions as to who would have the least number of cases, and the result was published in orders periodically throughout the winter. It finally came to be looked on as rather a disgrace to be at the bottom of the list, and the result was that this unpleasant and serious disease was reduced to a minimum. The ration parties taking food up to the front

line at night used to take a sufficient number of dry socks to equip every man in the trenches and bring away with them the wet discarded pairs, which were then washed and dried and sent up in due course. That peculiarly useful article the Tommy's Cooker was employed in large numbers to enable the men to obtain the hot food which the medical authorities proclaimed as a panacea, or at any rate a preventative, for trench feet, and this undoubtedly was the case. The difficulty always was to obtain sufficient supplies of the Tommy's Cooker, as the demand was always for more, the men thoroughly appreciating the comfort of being able to get a hot drink whenever they wanted it.

No one who was in France during the winter of '16-'17 will ever forget it, at any rate if they happened to be in the part of the line which was held by the 7th Division during that period. It was certainly the worst winter experienced during the whole war. Incessant and torrential rain from October to January was followed by a sudden change to very severe frost (6° Fahr. at times), which lasted

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from the middle of January for six weeks and then changed again to snow and sleet, accompanied by heavy thunderstorms lasting well into April.

What these conditions meant to the troops holding the line can be better imagined than described, although it is hardly possible for any one not acquainted with it to imagine the depth and stickiness of the mud in the Ancre Valley. The trenches became impossible. With enormous labour they were constantly repaired, and even rebuilt, only to fall in again after a particularly bad downpour. While the frost lasted all was well, but when the thaw came they fell in like a pack of cards. It was disheartening, and with weary and mud-bedraggled men it at times seemed almost impossible; but the trenches had to be kept going at all costs, and so it was done. That Ancre mud was a positive nightmare, and to no one more so than the Brigadier and his Staff, for more than once he had literally to be dug out of a trench in which he had sunk to his waist during his rounds. On one occasion, during a relief, an officer and two privates fell

into a shell hole on their way from the front line; every effort was immediately made to rescue them, but without success, owing to the state of the ground, the heavy shelling and pitch darkness. These efforts were continued until daylight, when the rescue party was compelled to withdraw owing to their exposed position. The following night a further rescue party was organised, equipped with 'duck-boards,' ropes, and shovels, and these with great difficulty and at considerable personal risk succeeded in effecting the rescue; the officer was just alive and recovered, but the two men had succumbed to cold and exposure.

The lot of the front line troops during that time was not a happy one. Four days of it was as much as flesh and blood could stand, but in spite of the horrible discomforts and appalling conditions the men remained cheery and contented. They would come out after relief covered with mud, wet through, weary and chilled to the bone; but next day, after a hot meal and a good sleep, they were singing and joking and busy cleaning up their mud-stained clothes and equipment and quite ready

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to face it all again in three or four days' time—in fact, not only ready, but eager and willing on the off-chance of “outing a Boche.” Truly the salt of the earth, such men couldn't be beaten, and their deeds deserve a modern Virgil or Homer to do them justice.

In spite of the weather conditions, however, there was no thought of allowing the Hun to sit unmolested on the other side of the shell-swept stretch of mud and rusty wire known as “No Man's Land.” His condition was even worse than ours, and desertions under the excuse of ‘losing the way’ were common and grew in frequency as the interminable winter wore on. The Boche position in this part overlooked ours in a most disconcerting way, and his powers of observation were detrimental to every one's peace and comfort in approaching the forward areas. Moreover, as offensive operations were due to take place as soon as the state of the ground admitted, it was necessary that a good position from which to start off should be assured. With this object in view a minor operation was planned, the objective being the commanding ground known as

Munich Trench, immediately East of the village of Beaumont Hamel; this trench constituted the Boche front line. Great care was taken to make the operation a success. The Brigade was taken out of the line, and by means of dummy trenches constructed in the back area the different battalions were constantly practised in their various rôles till every man knew exactly where to go and what he had to do. The great difficulty was the state of the ground; it was impossible to move quickly across No Man's Land, the more so in view of the great weight it is essential for men to carry in an attack. It presented a very difficult problem. Many people thought it would be impracticable, but eventually it was decided that it was possible if the weight carried by the individual man could be reduced to a minimum and the pace likewise reduced, so as to avoid undue fatigue to the attacking troops. Some idea can be formed of the state of affairs when it is stated that the "Creeping Barrage" was timed to advance at a rate of 50 yards in five minutes, the slowest barrage, probably, that had ever been known. This slow pace came in for

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a great deal of hostile criticism ; it was argued that such a barrage would defeat its own object by giving the enemy time to bring his own barrage down on the attacking troops before they could get across the intervening space to the enemy's trenches. On the other hand unless the infantry could keep in touch with their own covering barrage it was useless ; and as it was impossible to move faster over that ground in the state it was in, it was deemed better to chance the enemy's retaliation coming down so soon and so accurately, than to risk the chance of certain failure by losing the cover of our own artillery at the crucial moment—i.e. the moment it lifted from the objective trench which was known to be heavily defended by machine guns as well as infantry.

Three battalions—the 1st S. Staffordshires (Lieut.-Colonel Beauman), the 21st (Lieut.-Colonel Woodward) and the 22nd Manchesters (Major Ramsbotham)—were detailed to carry out the attack, the front of which was about 800 yards. The fourth battalion had the unenviable duty of providing carrying parties for the attacking battalions—i.e. carrying parties

for the necessary supply of bombs, ammunition, etc., thus relieving the weight on the actual attackers. This particular duty is a thankless as well as a dangerous task, and on this occasion it was carried out by the 2nd Queens with a precision and loyalty to its sister units which left nothing to be desired.

The attack was to take place at dawn on January 11, 1917. The Brigade took over the line the previous night and the troops formed up for the assault the next night at 2 a.m., on the tape line which had been laid down in front of the trenches earlier in the evening. All the assembling and forming up was carried out without attracting the attention of the enemy, the night being very cold and dark, and no casualties were incurred from the hostile artillery.

The success of the enterprise was to a great extent dependent on the capture of certain trenches to the South of Munich Trench. This had been done with complete success by the 20th Infantry Brigade, under Brig.-General Green, on the night before, with the result of making the right flank secure.

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A very heavy bombardment of all the enemy trenches in the vicinity had been continued for several days previous to the operation, but with no special attention to the objective in order to mislead the enemy as to the real point of attack. At three minutes before "Zero," the Divisional Artillery opened an intensive bombardment on a line 300 yards in front of the tape line on which the assaulting troops formed up; and at Zero this barrage moved forward, followed by the infantry.

Zero was fixed for 6.40 a.m., at which hour a heavy mist lay on the ground, which made observation impossible and assisted to make the operation the surprise that it was intended to be. The morning was very dark and lowering, with rain and sleet at intervals, turning to snow; a morning, in fact, when one would think one's courage would be at its lowest ebb; but there was no faltering, and when Zero hour came round and the barrage went forward, the troops followed close upon it, wave after wave, in the way in which they had been trained beforehand. Everything went like clockwork and the attacking troops captured their objec-

tives almost before the Boche had time to know what was in the wind. There was some fierce fighting at different points along the line and great difficulty was found, in the mud-bedraggled area, in actually finding Munich Trench at all, more especially in those portions of the line which had been obliterated by the combined effect of artillery fire and weather. So much so, that the battalion forming the right of the line, the 22nd Manchesters, actually overran the trench and went some distance beyond it, causing some anxious moments to the Brigadier until it was discovered what had occurred and steps could be taken to recall the over-zealous warriors. By 8.30 a.m. the whole position had been taken, touch had been gained all along the line with the exception of the extreme right flank, where it was not established till nightfall (owing probably to the confusion caused by the right advancing too far), and consolidation was being rapidly carried out. It is one thing taking a position, under modern conditions ; it is quite another holding it when it is won. A new position is invariably made the target of every gun that can be brought to

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bear on it with the object of causing casualties or preparing the way for a counter-attack. The present one was no exception to the rule, as the enemy shelled the position till dark very severely from the moment he found out what had occurred. To avoid, as far as possible, the effects of this bombardment, the troops holding and consolidating the front line had been thinned out as soon as the line had some stability, the idea being to hold it by a series of small posts, instead of one continuous line, with supports in the rear. This had been very expeditiously carried out by the battalions concerned, with the result that casualties were comparatively light and the work of establishing and strengthening the new line of posts was not seriously interfered with. By nightfall the assaulting companies were relieved by the ones in reserve, and with the help of a party of Royal Engineers and Pioneers, the work of consolidation was carried on, wire was put up in front of the line, duckboard tracks in lieu of communication trenches laid out, and everything done to secure the ground that had been won. The night was bitterly cold, with a

north wind and some snow, which probably assisted in hastening the preparations, as the men worked hard to keep themselves warm. The next day was uneventful, but the hostile shelling still continued with unabated vigour, but owing to the precautions taken this did not cause the damage it might have done. Preparations, such as laying tape lines to the various posts and completing the duckboard tracks, were made for the relief of the attacking Brigade. During the afternoon, the enemy put down a heavy and sudden barrage on the left of the line, a counter-attack was expected, and an S.O.S. actually did go up from a neighbouring Division, but it never materialised. It is doubtful if a counter-attack could have been made at such a short notice with the ground in that state. It was discovered later from an intercepted message that the barrage was put down for defensive purposes only, as apparently it was expected that the assault would be renewed.

During the night of the 12th-13th, the Brigade was relieved by the 22nd Infantry Brigade and the weary but cheerful troops

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made their way out through the mud to a well-earned rest. It was snowing hard and black as Erebus when the Brigadier and his staff at about 2 a.m. made their way back to the ruined village of Auchonvillers, where a motor-car was waiting to take them back to their new headquarters. In spite of the weather it was a very cheery party, weary though it was, that picked its way from the filthy dug-out which had formed the battle headquarters, back to the comparative luxury of a dirty farm-house, where a tub and a shave and some decent food awaited them, prepared by a careful Staff Captain, Morshead, who had preceded them during the afternoon. The casualties on this occasion were very little over 200; whilst against them could be put 200 prisoners, various machine guns and a very considerable number of casualties on the enemy's part. Altogether a successful show which appeared in the official dispatch as "the most important and successful of the Winter Operations." The chief result of this affair was that it deprived the Germans of most of the advantage in observation which they had heretofore pos-

sessed, with a corresponding increase to our own, and it was probably one of the factors which eventually caused their withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line later in the year.

Shortly after this operation the Brigadier went home on leave, and the Division came out of the line with the belief that it was to have six weeks of rest and training in a back area—a belief which, like many others, did not actually come off according to the programme, as three weeks later found them moving once more towards their old line to relieve the 62nd Division, which had replaced them and which had come in for a hard time during the severe frost which lasted from the moment of their taking over until well into February.

During the interval, the Division had lost its popular Commander, General Watts, who was given well-deserved promotion and appointed to the newly raised 19th Corps. Every one deplored his departure, although they were glad for his sake that promotion had come. He was a fine leader of men, and had that peculiar capacity of endearing himself to the rank and file to a very marked degree. They

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would have done anything for him, a valuable asset not always appreciated at its due worth. He was succeeded in command by Major-General George Barrow, who later commanded in Palestine with great success, and was awarded the K.C.B. for his services. He did not remain long, however, in command, but was succeeded at the beginning of April by Major-General Shoubridge, who commanded the Division to the end of the war.

Chapter 2 : *The Commence-
ment of the German Retreat,*
1917

A COLD, cheerless morning, a thick mist overlying everything, emphasising the biting cold. The ground was sodden, and the Ancre mud seemed thicker and stickier than ever. In these circumstances the desolation and dreariness of the front line was intense; the whole ground was littered with the *débris* of a battlefield—dead bodies lay scattered, some lying in shell-holes where one came across them suddenly, others in the open, in a litter of equipment, bombs, and ammunition-boxes; while here and there a rifle, stuck in the ground upside-down, marked an impromptu grave. Truly the abomination of desolation, depressing beyond measure in the early grey of dawn, when thoughts of breakfast and a fire were powerful magnets to draw one back to head-

quarters, however squalid and uncomfortable they might be.

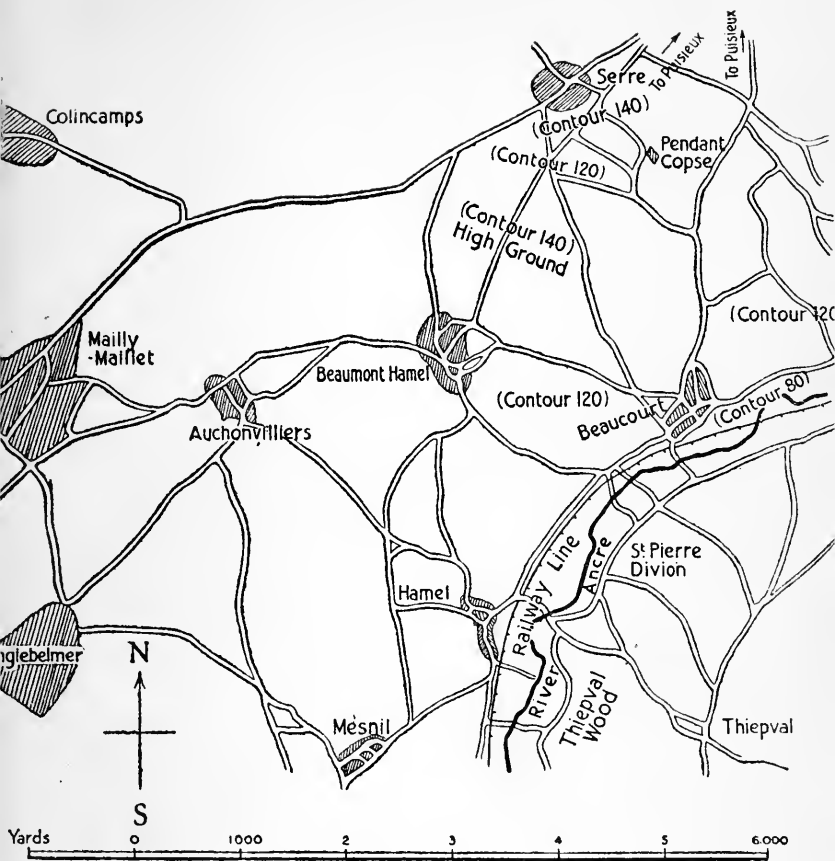
Such was the scene that greeted the Brigadier as he went round the line the morning after the relief (February 23), accompanied by his orderly and Brigade-Major. There was much to be done: the front line consisted of isolated posts in shell-holes, backed up by the semblance of a trench, in which were a few old German dug-outs constituting the Company headquarters of the troops in the line. A certain amount of readjustment was needed to suit his requirements—new posts to be selected and put into position, Lewis-gun positions to be sited, various small questions of supply of rations and ammunition to be gone into and discussed, all requiring reconnaissance and calling for a considerable amount of creeping and crawling and running to get to the best places for seeing without too much exposure, as the enemy line was supposed to be very close to our own.

Everything was, however, as quiet as the grave. There was no sound, not a rifle-shot, not a movement of any kind, not even a

stray shell or anything to break the tense stillness. Gradually it dawned upon all three of the little party that this hush was abnormal, and almost unconsciously their movements got more bold and their excursions towards the front further than was customary, until, finally, they got right under the wire of what used to be one of the German front-line posts. Still not a sound, no shot was fired. It was uncanny. And then it flashed across them—had the Germans gone? It looked like it and yet one knew their guile. It required more than the little party of three to find it out for certain. Back they went as fast as they could drag their feet out of the mud to the nearest Battalion Headquarters and the Brigadier quickly told the situation to a hastily-aroused Commanding Officer and ordered patrols to be instantly sent out to find out what was actually happening. The Brigade-Major was then sent on to the other Battalion Headquarters with similar orders for the C.O. whose battalion was opposite Serre, while the Brigadier made the best of his way back to his headquarters to inform the Division by telephone of what was happening

and the measures he had taken to deal with the situation. It was an exciting time—every one was on tenterhooks to hear the result of the reconnaissance patrols which had been sent out, but nothing could be done until something definite from them came in. This waiting for definite information is one of the trying features of modern warfare ; and on this occasion, as so much depended upon what the patrols discovered, it was more trying than usual. The morning and afternoon dragged on slowly, relieved by rumours more or less authentic that the patrols were making progress, and eventually at about 4 p.m. the C.O.'s concerned sent back the patrol reports so anxiously awaited. These definitely asserted that those on the left had penetrated into Serre itself without opposition, while on the right "Pendant Copse" and the slopes south of the village were also reported clear ; and that in the meanwhile the ground had been occupied by a new line of posts. It was now 5 o'clock, the winter day was rapidly drawing to a close and darkness had practically set in. The state of the ground absolutely precluded an advance that night, so

the Brigadier decided to advance at dawn the following morning and occupy Serre Village and the ridge running Southwards to the Ancre, and thence to move forward towards the village of Puisieux. The Division was informed and the plan acquiesced in, and orders to this effect were sent out to the two front-line battalions. Shortly after the orders had been dispatched, a car rolled up to the door of the Brigade Headquarters and the Army Commander came into the room which served as office, sitting- and dining-room combined. It was evident from the first moment that he knew nothing of what had occurred, and it transpired afterwards that he had been out all day and had merely called in on his way back, as he frequently did. The Brigadier rapidly explained the situation to him and informed him of the measures taken and of the plan for the following day. The Army Commander was naturally greatly surprised, as although such a move was thought likely by the higher command, it was not expected that it would take place so early or that it could be accomplished without any indication to the front-line troops. He wished the advance to



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be carried out at once and was desperately anxious that no time should be lost in following up and gaining touch with the enemy ; but it was pointed out to him by the Brigadier that such a move was impossible before daylight on account of the nature of the ground and the fact that it would have to be carried out by the troops holding the line who were already rather exhausted. After a little argument the Brigadier carried his point, and with many injunctions to press on as early and as fast as possible Sir Hubert Gough departed and every one settled down to complete the thousand and one details essential to the morrow's operations, with the welcome addition of dinner after such a hard and exciting day. During the evening, news came from the Division that Army Headquarters had ordered a general advance all along the line so that the Brigade's advance in consequence would be assisted by other troops on its left and right—a piece of information which relieved the Brigadier's mind considerably—and shortly afterwards he pushed his staff off to bed, with the exception of the officer on

duty, whose pleasing task it was to sit at the end of the telephone all night.

“Zero” had been fixed for 5 a.m. on the following morning, at which hour both front-line battalions were to advance under cover of strong patrols and establish themselves on the first objective (i.e. Serre Village and the ridge running South of it), and gain touch with the troops on their left and right.

Owing to the darkness and fog, and the difficulty of forming up and making the necessary preparations for an advance, the actual move forward was not commenced until 6 a.m. Once launched, however, the advance continued steadily. The battalion on the right, the 1st S. Staffordshires, and the right company of the left battalion, the 21st Manchesters, passed the line of Pendant Copse at 6.30 a.m. and moved steadily forward. Owing to the thick fog, direction was lost to a great extent at this point, the front line bearing off to the left. Considerable opposition was met with at one point on the Southern outskirts of Serre, where the Boche had established a strong post with machine guns. A determined attack was

organised, the line was reinforced and the post forced to retire. The final objective was reached in this part of the line at 9.30 a.m., and the work of consolidation was commenced at once. The left company of the line encountered an enemy post in Serre and was held up for about an hour before it was finally outflanked and dislodged, the final objective being reached here at 10.30 a.m.

In the meanwhile no trace of troops of the 62nd Division on the right could be found, which left the flank considerably *en l'air*. Eventually the reserve company of the 1st S. Staffordshires was ordered up to form a defensive flank in that direction. By the time they arrived in position the fog had lifted and patrols succeeded in locating the neighbouring troops, who were further to the South than had been intended. The reserve company therefore prolonged the line Southwards and obtained touch with the battalion of the 62nd Division on their right. On the left, too, considerable difficulty was experienced owing to the fog in getting into touch with the 19th Division. It was not until the afternoon that

the troops of this Division could be seen advancing and touch was eventually established; in the meantime the reserve company of the 21st Manchesters had had to form a defensive flank facing Northwards during the day. As soon as the first objective had been taken the Brigadier had been anxious to press forward and establish the Brigade in Puisieux, which lay in the valley beyond, and orders were sent to the support and reserve battalions to be ready to move forward through the front-line battalions and advance on that objective. Owing, however, to the precarious situation of the Brigade, with both flanks uncovered, the further advance could not be attempted until the necessary support could be obtained. By the time touch had been gained and the flanking Divisions had come into line, the afternoon was far advanced and the light was beginning to fail. It was considered inadvisable to continue the advance that day, as although fresh troops were available the ground could not be reconnoitred, and movement in the dark over unknown ground might well have been disastrous. Orders were therefore issued for the support and re-

serve battalions to relieve the front-line units that night. This was carried out successfully and completed matters as far as the Brigade was concerned.

The operation was thus accomplished with very little opposition. The total casualties only amounted to one killed and eight wounded, and five prisoners were taken with two or three machine guns. These casualties were so light that the Division, when the Casualty Report was forwarded in due course, rang up to enquire how many noughts had been omitted!

Such resistance as was offered was clearly that of small parties holding on to posts till the last minute with the object of delaying our advance. Serre, which once had been a charming little village, prettily situated on a knoll overlooking all the adjoining country and surrounded by trees and orchards, was now a shapeless, shell-swept mud heap. No trace of it remained; hardly a brick could be seen and every tree was either flattened or merely a blackened pole. It was difficult even to determine the site of it; so much so that the patrols of the previous day, although they had actually

been in the village itself, had no idea of the fact until their route had been carefully checked from the map. The gallantry and ability with which these patrols were handled was a noticeable feature of the operation, and the young officers who led them were deservedly given the Military Cross for their exploit.

This operation, small and inexpensive as it was, was productive of far-reaching results. It opened the way to the big forward movement for the pursuit of the Boche to his famous line in rear. It inaugurated the beginning of that open warfare to which every one was anxious to return, and which, although it did not last for long, had a tremendous effect on the moral of the troops and showed both them and their commanders that they were quite capable of manœuvring in the open against their adversaries. It served, too, to show that the judgment and conclusions of the man on the spot, whose appreciation of the situation is based on what he has actually seen with his own eyes, should not be ignored. He is the only man who can choose the psychological moment for initiating a movement of this kind, where

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several factors have to be taken into account, such as the state of the ground, knowledge of the locality, or the reverse, and the fitness or otherwise of the troops concerned. On this occasion the Brigadier's views were admitted to be sound, and although there were urgent reasons to justify haste, he was allowed to carry out the operation in his own time and in the way he considered best suited to the occasion. The result proved that the movement was a sound one and that no time would have been gained by initiating it earlier.

Chapter 3 ; *Bucquoy—Croisilles—
the Hindenburg Line. Bulle-
court*

THE German retreat was carried out with great steadiness and skill, the bulk of their troops and heavy guns being removed under cover of small rearguards composed largely of machine guns and light artillery, and assisted by heavily wired lines of trenches, which had been in preparation months beforehand. Owing to the weather and the state of the roads, which were also mined before they were evacuated, our advance was necessarily slow, and great difficulty was experienced in moving even the field artillery forward and keeping them supplied with ammunition ; still greater difficulty, as can be imagined, was found in moving the heavy guns. The infantry therefore did not obtain sufficient support from guns to enable them successfully to cope with the

wire and machine guns with which the enemy opposed them at certain well-defined positions. The higher command, meanwhile, were anxious to press the enemy to the fullest extent and not to allow him to retire in his own time.

An attack was carried out at Bucquoy on March 13 by the Brigade. The Germans had been gradually pushed back through Puisieux to a line through Bucquoy which they intended to hold in order to admit of their removing their heavy guns and impedimenta further to the rear. This line was a very strong one, heavily defended by machine guns and thick wire. The original idea was to attack it, in conjunction with other divisions, with two brigades on the Divisional front, but on March 13 it was reported by aeroplanes that the line was not held in any strength and that there were indications of the enemy retiring from it. The Brigade at this time was holding the line and was to be relieved the next day by the two assaulting brigades. At about 1 p.m., however, orders were received to occupy the village with patrols and the front-line battalion was at once ordered to send patrols forward to find out the

situation. Shortly after the receipt of the first order a second was received with definite instructions for an attack that night. Just after 3 p.m. the O.C. front-line battalion sent in the results of the patrols which he had sent out. There were four altogether, all of whom without exception reported the village strongly held by machine guns and the wire very thick and uncut. A report to this effect was sent in by the Brigadier, who expressed in writing his opinion that the attack was not a feasible proposition and that, as his battalions had only recently taken over the line, they did not know the ground; moreover, that there was not sufficient time to organise an attack by 11.45 that night, and that he considered that an attack at dawn would have a greater chance of success. The attack was however ordered to proceed, although at 1 a.m. in place of 11.45 p.m.; but although Zero hour was thus pushed forward, the original intention of bombarding the village from 10 to 10.30 p.m. was not altered, in spite of protests from the Brigadier. The consequence was that the active patrolling during the day and this bom-

bardment such a long time before the actual operations of the infantry took place, put the enemy on the *qui vive* and gave him a very good indication of our intentions. As the Brigadier expected, the operation was a complete failure. At 1 a.m. the infantry moved forward. The night was exceptionally dark and the ground very heavy. The wire was found to be dense and impenetrable. The enemy's artillery and machine-gun fire was intense as soon as operations started. In one place only was an entrance effected—on the extreme right of the attack. Here the right company of the right battalion, the 22nd Manchesters, got through the wire and established itself in the trench, which they held until the supply of bombs, both British and German, was exhausted. It was eventually driven out by a determined hostile counter-attack. Most of the surviving members of that company were captured. As soon as information reached Brigade Headquarters that the operation had been unsuccessful, the Brigadier ordered the troops to withdraw to their original line. In the course of the following twenty-four hours the Brigade was relieved.

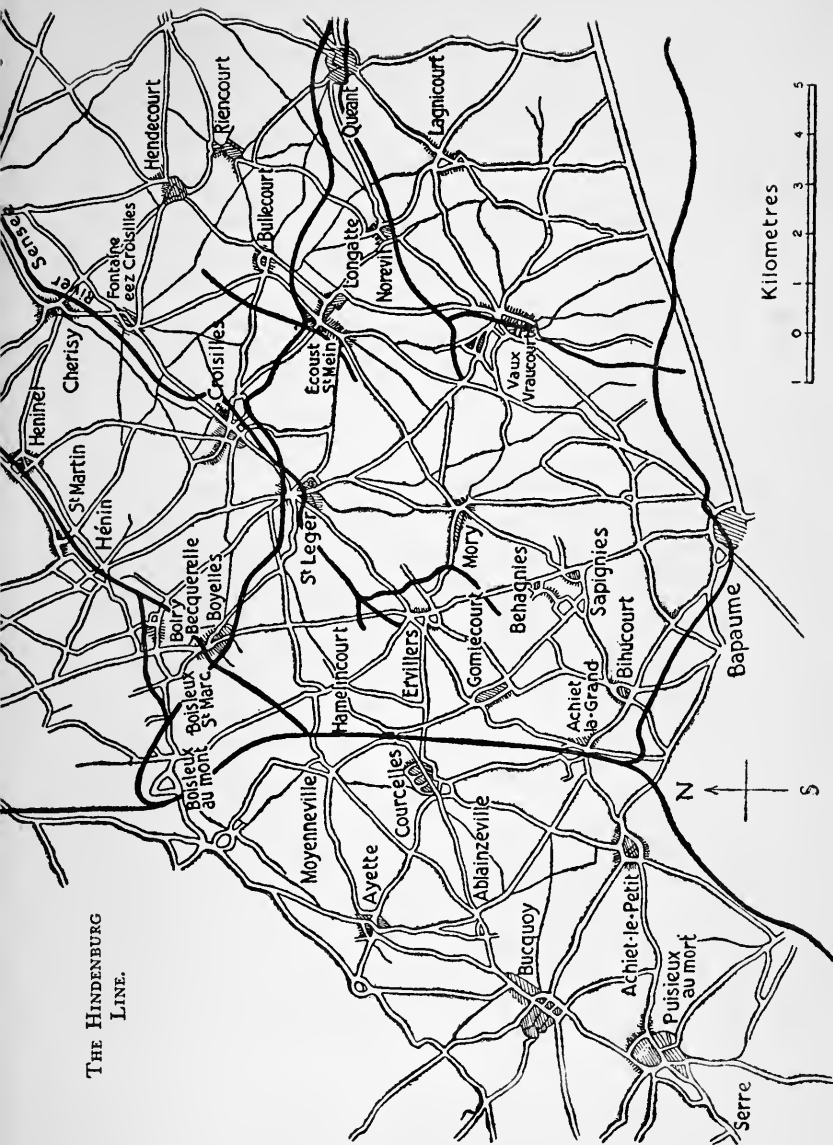
The primary cause of this failure was the state of the wire. In viewing the position afterwards, when the Germans had withdrawn, it was not surprising that it was able to withstand an impromptu attack in pitch darkness and pouring rain by men to whom the ground was entirely new. The triple belt of wire was scarcely damaged and the trench in the rear of it was full of machine-gun emplacements carefully and skilfully placed to bring a cross fire to bear in front of it.

In his own time the enemy evacuated the Bucquoy line and, slowly followed by our advanced guards, withdrew further Eastwards, making no prolonged resistance to our advance until the comparatively high ground in front of the Hindenburg Line was reached, which formed an outpost position to the main line behind. In this portion of the line, this consisted of a ridge running between the villages of Croisilles and Ecoust and continued to North and South with small re-entrants running into it from the West, in one of which the village of Croisilles lay. It was a strong position, well defended by a trench system and a considerable

amount of wire. Situated on a higher ridge, in rear of it, was the famous Hindenburg Line, with its lines of barbed wire which looked, when viewed from a distance, as if it were one solid block. A tough proposition to tackle, as indeed it proved itself to be.

Since March 25, one battalion of the Brigade had been holding the line facing the village of Croisilles which was heavily defended by trenches, wire, and machine guns ; it moreover lay in a hollow, as already pointed out, and therefore was a difficult place to attack unless the high ground on either side of it could be taken and held. This meant a very wide extension of front. Nevertheless, it was decided that an attempt should be made to carry it with one brigade as it was an important tactical point for further operations. It was however pointed out by the Brigadier, whose Brigade had been detailed for this duty, that one brigade was not sufficient to cope with such a big objective, the front of attack being alone 1,500 yards, with a defensive flank, if the operation was successful, of a further 1,200 yards. An additional difficulty lay in the fact that the wire had not been

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LINE.



properly cut in front of the village, which being in a hollow was screened from proper observation by the artillery observing officers, which rendered the cutting of the wire very difficult and problematical. However, it was essential that the village should be taken, or that some indication should be obtained of how it was held and in what strength, so the operation was ordered to proceed.

On the night of March 27, the line of posts East of St. Leger and opposite Croisilles, held by one battalion of the Brigade, were taken over by two fresh battalions, the 1st S. Staffordshires and the 22nd Manchesters, who were to make the assault. The relieved battalion, the 21st Manchesters, went back to rest-billets, and the fourth battalion of the Brigade, the 2nd Queens, moved up early in the morning of the 28th to a position of readiness near Brigade Headquarters, to support the attack. The task of the left battalion, the 1st S. Staffordshires, was to make good the high ground North of the village, and the right battalion, the 22nd Manchesters, had a similar task on the South, the scheme being that both these attacks should

effect a junction on the Eastern exit of the village and thus completely surround it; a small proportion of each battalion only was to work through the village. The assaulting battalions were to be formed up on a line 200 yards beyond the edge of St. Leger wood by Zero minus 30 minutes, and were then to advance 300 yards so as to be close under the barrage by Zero hour. The attack was launched at 5.45 a.m. on March 28. Both companies of the 22nd Manchesters were met with heavy machine-gun fire and failed to penetrate the wire, which was uncut except for a small gap. At one place however twelve men under a very gallant officer, Captain Duguid, of the 22nd Manchesters, cut a passage through the wire and established themselves in the enemy lines where they remained for thirty-six hours till relieved. The remainder of the battalion dug themselves in near the wire till nightfall, when they were ordered to withdraw to the original line. On the left, the right company of the 1st S. Staffordshires was immediately held up by very heavy rifle and machine-gun fire, but had nevertheless succeeded in advancing a

considerable distance. The supporting company became absorbed in this attack, and a mixed party worked close up to the enemy wire. Here they were heavily counter-attacked, but drove the attack back and inflicted considerable casualties. Owing to their exposed situation and the severity of the fire to which they were subjected, this party was eventually forced to withdraw about 100 yards to a sunken road, where they dug in and remained throughout the day. Meanwhile the left company had advanced successfully a considerable distance towards their objective, but were eventually held up by heavy enfilade and frontal machine gun and rifle fire. Owing to the failure of the right company to advance, a considerable gap had been formed between the two companies. What happened afterwards to this company is very obscure, but probably, after maintaining their isolated position under very heavy fire for two hours, they were heavily counter-attacked from the German main position and completely enveloped. All except the left platoon, who were acting as a defensive flank, became casualties, or were taken prisoners. A further effort

with the reserve company and four machine guns was made later, about 8 a.m., but it was found impossible to advance over the open owing to the exposed nature of the ground which on this flank was a regular glacia. When darkness came on, the troops were ordered to retire to their original line. It was proposed to renew the attack at dawn next morning with two fresh battalions, but this was cancelled, the attack on the village becoming part of a larger attack four days later.

Considered in the light of subsequent events, there is little cause for surprise at the result of this attack. For one brigade to advance over a mile of exposed country and occupy an objective 1,500 yards in extent is, in itself, an operation of considerable magnitude. When 1,200 yards of this advance is exposed to a village, heavily wired and strongly held, and when the left flank was exposed to a depth of 1,200 yards, the problem is further complicated. Considered, however, as a reconnaissance in force, the attack established the fact that the enemy was not prepared to throw open the approaches to the Hindenburg Line, and this information

may have contributed to the success of the operation on April 2.

About this time the Brigadier was present at a very interesting conference which was held at Divisional H.Q. The Commander-in-Chief, Sir Douglas Haig, was present and amongst others with him were Generals Allenby, commanding the 3rd Army, Gough, commanding the 5th Army, and David Campbell, commanding the 21st Division. Sir Douglas had come to confer with his Army Commanders on the ground, in regard to the operations at Arras which were due to take place on or about April 9.

Four days later, on April 2, the attack on Croisilles was renewed, but on a much larger scale. In conjunction with the 21st Division on the left and the 4th Australian Division on the right the 7th Division was ordered to capture the villages of Ecoust-Longatte and Croisilles, and to establish a line of posts on the slopes below the Hindenburg Line. The task of the right brigade of the 21st Division was to establish itself on the high ground North of Croisilles and work round the Eastern exits

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from the village, where they were to gain touch with the 91st Brigade.

A sister brigade on the right was to capture Ecoust-Longatte and the line of the railway running Northwards towards Croisilles. The rôle of the 91st Brigade was to occupy the line of the railway and the high ground South of Croisilles and work round the Eastern exit of the village and then gain touch with the 21st Division, thus completely surrounding the village ; and at the same time to establish a line of posts running parallel to the South boundary of the village, as a temporary defensive flank. When these operations were complete, the village was to be cleared by direct assault.

The artillery arrangements were carefully worked out and co-ordinated, the infantry advancing under a creeping barrage to their objective, and the village itself was bombarded with heavy artillery until the first objective was taken. The artillery support was excellent and materially contributed to the success of the operation. All day long, as soon as the first objective had been taken, they were able to engage as targets the bodies of enemy infan-

try retiring into the Hindenburg Line and inflict heavy casualties on the portion of the enemy who attempted to break out from Croisilles by the Fontaine Road. The heavy howitzers, too, did good work in reducing the strong points in Croisilles and its outskirts, especially the one usually called the "Tooth," which required two separate doses before it was finally disposed of.

The attack was carried out by three battalions in line, namely the 2nd Queens, 21st Manchesters, and 1st S. Staffordshires respectively from left to right, their objective being the line of the railway already mentioned, the left battalion forming the defensive flank along the line of the village and establishing itself on the Eastern exit and gaining touch with the 21st Division there. The 22nd Manchesters were to clear the village. A fifth battalion, the 2nd Royal Warwickshires, was lent to the Brigade to hold the line vacated by the attacking troops.

The night of the 1st-2nd of April was fine, with bright moonlight which assisted the march of the troops to their forming-up positions.

In the clear moonlight however one company of the leading battalion, the 2nd Queens, was observed advancing down an exposed spur, a number of "golden rain" rockets were immediately sent up by the enemy and the valley beyond the spur was heavily shelled. But the limits of this barrage were so clearly defined that the battalions who followed were able to keep clear of it, and carry out the assembly march successfully.

At 5.15 a.m. the advance started. The 1st S. Staffords shires met with little opposition and, gaining their objective, opened a heavy Lewis-gun fire on parties of the Boche making their escape across the open to the Hindenburg Line. The centre battalion was checked at the outset by our own barrage, which was somewhat short, but as it lifted they were able to advance. The railway embankment however at this point proved to be a very formidable obstacle, being some forty feet high and covered with a low scrub. A small culvert ran through the embankment about the centre, above which was a strong machine-gun emplacement heavily wired. The top of the embankment was

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defended by a series of rifle posts with a considerable amount of wire in the scrub in front of them. As the battalion advanced it was met by heavy machine-gun and rifle fire from the embankment and from a machine gun concealed in the culvert. Machine-gun fire from the South side of Croisilles, where the left battalion had been delayed, also hampered the advance. The embankment however was gained after a struggle, by 6.30 a.m. The enfilade machine-gun fire from the village then became so intense that the line was forced to retire below the embankment. The right company eventually succeeded in getting a Lewis gun over, and by means of dribbling little parties of men over and using the culvert, the line was established in the sunken road beyond, by 10 a.m.

Meanwhile the right and centre battalions had pushed on to the slopes in front of the Hindenburg Line, and the second objective was reached by all three battalions shortly after 11 a.m. and consolidation at once commenced. The Brigadier at this point ordered up six Vickers guns to the railway embankment which now formed a very strong support line. Touch

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was maintained throughout the morning with the Brigade operating on the right, but no signs of the Division on the left could be found East of Croisilles, where they should have been "according to plan." The consequence was that the idea of completely isolating and surrounding the village did not come off. Throughout the morning parties of the enemy attempted to leave the village by the Fontaine Road, but were turned back by the fire of our posts. They however eventually escaped by the road North-East from the village, which the left Division should have occupied, but they apparently had been held up until it was too late, which was a pity, as there was little doubt that, had that exit been blocked, a very large number of the enemy would have been effectively cut off.

The situation of the front line being now assured, the Brigadier ordered the 22nd Manchesters under Colonel Woodward to clear the village. Two companies forming up on either side of the river Sensée, which runs through the village, started at 11.30 a.m. under a barrage, the objective being the sunken road at the Eastern exit, strong bombing parties being also

detailed to work round the outer defence of the village on the North side.

In this formation the battalion entered the village and became swallowed up in it for the time being; little information came through, and the battalion practically disappeared into the labyrinth of ruined houses and masonry-cumbered streets of which the village was composed. The left company pushed on towards its objective, but soon became scattered and disorganised, as always happens in village fighting. The right company in the same way soon lost its direction and only one platoon eventually reached the objective—the sunken road already referred to. The bombing party became held up by a strong point on the Northern boundary. At 1.15 p.m. the support company was pushed in and became involved in the *mêlée*. Finally the two reserve platoons were sent by the Officer Commanding to deal with two strong points located by the advanced troops. By skilful handling and the proper use of Lewis guns, these were eventually overcome and the village was cleared except for some desultory fighting with isolated fragments of

the enemy, which continued most of the night. The situation was not finally cleared up until the early morning of the 3rd, when touch was established at all points with the left Division. The Brigade was relieved on the night of the 2nd/3rd, with the exception of the battalion actually in the village, which remained there until relieved by the Division on the left on the night of the 4th/5th, an unnecessarily long time to have kept a battalion which had had a very difficult task to perform and had carried it out with great dash and skill, but thus it was ordained by the Division in spite of the protest of the Brigadier.

The operation was entirely successful, and once more demonstrated clearly how much more efficacious and economical an attack on a broad front, properly co-ordinated and supported, was than the isolated enterprises which were so often attempted and which were earmarked beforehand for failure. The way to the Hindenburg Line was now clear on this part of the front, and the great offensive from the direction of Arras was the necessary sequel to the operation.

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The battle of Arras commenced on April 9, after a tremendous artillery preparation which lasted for about a week or longer, during which the enemy line was subjected to the heaviest bombardment which, up to that time, had been seen. The attack, which started on April 9, was a complete success; the infantry pushing forward drove the enemy from his positions East of Arras and penetrated deeply into his line. As time went on however the available troops became exhausted, and the operation eventually ended on the Sensée River. The whole front of the attack pivoted during the move forward on the village of Croisilles, which had been taken as described on April 2, and which considerably aided the operation.

It was not until May 11 that the 7th Division came again into the picture, as it was relieved and taken out to rest, although occasionally holding the line for short spaces of time.

It had been determined by the higher command that the Hindenburg Line should be attacked and broken in the vicinity of Bullecourt, a village forming part of the line

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immediately to the East of Ecoust—the main Hindenburg Line running through the Western outskirts of the village with the support line on the high ground East of it. This operation was to have been carried out simultaneously with an attack on the line of the Sensée River by General Allenby's army to the North. The primary operation was carried out by the 62nd Division and was a complete failure, the Boche position being very strong at this point and well supported by artillery. This Division, too, had only arrived a short time before from home and were therefore rather raw and untrained, and this was their first experience of heavy fighting. They were a fine Division and proved their worth later on, but on this occasion they were severely handicapped.

However, it was considered necessary that the village should be taken at all costs and the attacks were continued, the 7th Division being brought into line for this purpose. First one and then the other brigade attempted the task, but in spite of the utmost gallantry were unable to obtain more than a footing on the extreme edge of the village. It was

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then decided that the 91st Brigade was to make a further attempt in conjunction with an Australian Division on the right. The 62nd Division on the left was to send a party to capture a strong point known as "The Crucifix," which was situated on the extreme Western edge of the village and thus covered and supported the left flank. The Australian Division on the right was to capture the Hindenburg Support Line, South of the village, and link up with the Brigade assaulting the village. All the attacks hitherto made had been entirely of a frontal nature. The Brigadier, however, on being informed of the task he was to carry out, had intimated that he would prefer to attack from a new direction and produced a scheme for assaulting the village from a South-Westerly direction, from the Southern end of the Ecoust-Bullecourt Road. By this means touch was more easily obtained with the Australian Division on the right, the forming up of the assaulting troops was simplified and could be carried out comparatively under cover, and the supporting barrage could be made in enfilade, which increased its efficiency. An

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attack from this direction would also, he argued, come more as a surprise than if carried out in the former way. After some argument and not a little opposition this plan was eventually approved and sanctioned. Two battalions, the 1st S. Staffordshires and the 2nd Queens, were detailed to make the assault, forming up on a tape line previously laid on the required alignment. Another battalion, the 21st Manchesters, was detailed to carry out the "mopping up" of the village after capture, sending a company to each assaulting battalion for this purpose to follow the battalion with which they were acting. The fourth battalion, the 22nd Manchesters, remained in reserve in Ecoust with one company holding the line of the railway North of Ecoust and North of the Ecoust-Bullecourt Road. The Brigade Headquarters were in the vaults below what had once been the church of Ecoust, but which was now merely a chalk rubbish heap. These vaults were rather curious and were quarried out of hard chalk, the church having been built from the material taken from them. In places they were sixty feet deep and were

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very safe and commodious headquarters, but ventilation of any kind was an impossibility and the stuffiness of them will never be forgotten, although they felt cool when compared with the broiling heat outside, as the weather had suddenly become hot—hotter than any May ever remembered.

On the night of May 10/11, the Brigade took over the line from a sister Brigade of the Division (the 20th Brigade), the two assaulting battalions taking over the posts in Bullecourt in their respective spheres of attack. On the night of 11/12, the tape line for forming up on was laid out by the Engineers, and Brigade Headquarters moved from the sunken road which went by the cheery name of "The Dead Man" to the headquarters below the church in Ecoust. In the early morning of the 12th the two battalions making the attack were formed up with their leading waves on the tape line. This was successfully carried out with slight casualties, although the enemy maintained a steady bombardment on the South-West corner of the village.

Judging that the enemy's retaliation would

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be heavy and continuous, every means of communication was carefully thought out and organised by the Brigadier and his Signal Staff. Relay posts for runners were established in the communication trench (the only one) from Longatte to the South-West corner of Bullecourt. Two telephone lines had also been laid by different routes to the combined Battalion Headquarters in the line. A "power buzzer" set in duplicate was established, and this was supplemented by a field wireless apparatus. Every battalion was also supplied with carrier pigeons. In spite of all these preparations, communication broke down badly. The enemy very early in the proceedings put down a heavy high explosive and shrapnel barrage, which in a few minutes cut both telephone wires, smashed the power buzzer and the wireless apparatus, and in spite of heroic efforts on the part of all members of the signal section, the telephone lines remained practically useless for the rest of the day; as soon as they were renewed, they were cut again and again. All communication therefore devolved on the hard worked "runners,"

many of whom became casualties in their endeavours to get through. The pigeons were also a failure—most probably they refused to fly through the heavy barrage, or else became confused by it and lost their way or were killed.

Zero hour was at 3.40 a.m., at which hour the attack started. The 2nd Queens on the right accomplished their task with little opposition and, in touch with the Australian Division on the right, reached its objective in fine style by 4.15 a.m. Thence they at once pushed out a series of posts to the front, and consolidated a line just North of the road. Touch was gained with the Australian Division and with the battalion on the left, and as far as this part of the attack was concerned, all was *couleur de rose*. The advance of the 1st S. Staffordshires on the left was not so easy, however. At Zero hour, the enemy at once put down a very heavy barrage on the South-West corner of Bullecourt. Numerous machine-gun and rifle posts opened from the corner of the village. That part of the advancing troops immediately South of the road suffered very heavily, made little progress, and

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became very disorganised. But the troops farther South were able to obtain more cover, and in spite of losing a lot of men, pushed on very steadily and by 7 a.m. had established themselves in the Northern portions of the village, and touch was gained with the battalion on the right. At about 9 a.m. Colonel Beaman, commanding the 1st S. Staffordshires, considered that a fresh attack was necessary to drive the enemy from the Hindenburg Line West of the village and the houses adjoining it which were evidently strongly held and which formed the chief point of resistance. He therefore ordered up his reserve company to attack this part of the village. This attack was met with very heavy machine-gun fire, was unable to proceed, and eventually dug in in the centre of the village. In the meanwhile the 62nd Division on the left had failed to secure The Crucifix, with the result that the left flank remained uncovered and the Germans were able to send reinforcements into the village without hindrance.

The situation at this time was a very curious one. The whole of the village was occupied

by the Brigade except the Hindenburg Line running along its Western edge and the houses adjacent to it, the only outlet to which was the line of trench running from The Crucifix to the Hindenburg Support Line along the Northern edge of the village. Could this latter be carried the village was theirs, and the position won.

During the whole of this time, the Brigade Headquarters was in a state of ignorance as to what was happening on account of the failure of communication, due to the causes already touched upon. An aeroplane reconnaissance had, however, brought in the information that the troops had entered the village and that the right battalion and the Australians had gained their objectives. But the situation was very obscure, and the lack of information from the left battalion was the cause of much anxiety to the Brigadier—anxiety which was not lessened by the continuous and irritating complaints from the Division of the absence of news. It transpired that continuous reports had been sent from the battalion which never reached Brigade Headquarters, every runner

being either killed or badly wounded and the other means of communication being, of course, entirely suspended. By seven o'clock, no information having been received, the Brigadier sent one of his staff to the left Battalion Headquarters to obtain news of the situation and to return as soon as possible. At about 11 a.m. the first report was received, giving the situation at 9 a.m. as already described above. The Brigadier thereupon ordered three companies of the 22nd Manchesters to move forward and place themselves under the orders of the Officer Commanding the 1st S. Staffordshires, to whom he sent instructions to use these companies to attack the Western part of the village still occupied by the enemy and drive them out, in the manner best suited to the situation as it appeared to him at the time. By the time however that this order reached him, the Officer Commanding considered it impossible to deploy troops in daylight for an attack, owing to the intensity of the enemy's barrage and the rifle and machine-gun fire from this position, which had evidently been reinforced.

He therefore kept these companies in reserve under cover and did not use them. During the remainder of the day no further advance could be made, but the positions held were firmly consolidated. At about 1 p.m. the Staff Officer returned from the front line and confirmed what had already been reported, also bringing back a report from Colonel Beauman with a request for reinforcements to complete the taking of the village. These however had already been dispatched in accordance with the appreciation of the situation from former reports received before this arrived. On receipt of this information the Brigadier shortly after 2 p.m. made his way to the Battalion Headquarters, accompanied by his acting Brigade-Major, Captain Morshead, an officer as capable as he was reliable and the possessor of a charming personality, to see for himself how matters stood, to confer with his Battalion Commanders as to the steps to be taken, and to give orders for further operations. On arrival, after a very rough passage, further accentuated by its being a boiling day, when running across the open to dodge shells and

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machine-gun bullets was not a form of exercise to hanker after, he found the situation to be as follows : The 2nd Queens were firmly established in their objective, not having suffered excessive casualties, and reorganised into proper formation. The 1st S. Staffordshires and the "mopping up" Battalion, the 21st Manchesters, on the other hand, although well established in the village, were much disorganised from the constant fighting in which they had been engaged among the ruined houses and derelict streets, than which nothing is more conducive to disorganisation and difficulties of control. Moreover, the men were thoroughly exhausted by the heat and suffering from want of water which, although supplies were adequate, was difficult to distribute owing to the constant sniping which came from the enemy line on the West of the village. The Crucifix had not been taken, although early in the day a report had been received at Brigade Headquarters to the contrary. It was evident, however, from information received that the enemy still had means of communication with his main

line to the isolated posts still in the Western end of the village. With this aspect of the situation in his mind and thinking that a counter-attack was probable, the Brigadier, after the conference, decided to withdraw the 1st S. Staffordshires and the 21st Manchesters to the rear of Ecoust after dark, where they could reorganise, and to relieve them in the line by the 22nd Manchesters who were comparatively fresh. As it was impossible to move troops in daylight he also detailed a fifth battalion, the 2nd Royal Warwickshires, which had been lent him from a sister Brigade to make an attack at dawn the next morning on the German line still holding out on the West of the village. He indicated on the ground the way he wished the attack to be carried out. It was to start from a line East of the Boche line and, working westwards, to assault this line from the rear. With the exception of a short, sharp barrage of mixed H. E. and shrapnel from the field artillery, a few moments before Zero, the attack was not to be supported by artillery, as he deemed it wiser to trust to the element of surprise in

an attack from this direction, and also because arrangements for artillery support would have been very difficult, especially as time was short. Having settled all these points, the Brigadier returned to his headquarters to issue the necessary orders and to make arrangements for the various moves it entailed, well pleased with the success obtained and confident of being able to bring the operation to a satisfactory conclusion on the following day. On arrival, he rang up the Divisional Commander on the telephone and after explaining the situation he detailed the measures he proposed to take to deal with it and the way in which he was prepared to carry them out. He was met with a blank refusal to entertain his plans and was told that the operation had been a failure, and that the attack must be continued at all costs. The Brigadier replied by reiterating his former arguments against any further operations during daylight, and concluded by saying that the plan which he had already indicated was the one which he considered had the best chance of success, but that he was willing to carry out any other operation which the Divisional

Commander might consider necessary. The latter appeared to be somewhat annoyed and rang off after intimating that further orders would be sent and that no relief of any of the troops was to take place. In a few minutes the telephone bell rang again: it was the Divisional Commander, who proceeded to inform the Brigadier that in his opinion the Brigadier was too tired to cope with the situation, that his judgment was therefore warped, and that he considered it advisable that he should relinquish his command to the next senior and return to Divisional Headquarters for the night. After protesting against this arrangement, the Brigadier was forced to obey and handed over command that evening to Colonel Norman of the 21st Manchesters, and proceeded as ordered to Divisional Headquarters, departing on leave the following day.

After the Brigadier's departure, an attack by the 2nd R. Warwickshires and two companies of the 22nd Manchesters was planned to take place at 3.40 a.m. on the following morning. This attack was a combined frontal and enveloping one, the two companies of the 22nd Man-

chesters attacking from the North side of the main road, the 2nd Warwickshires advancing from the South-West to attack that portion of the line. This operation was launched at the time named but was a complete failure, as they could make no progress in face of the heavy hostile shelling. The two companies of the 22nd Manchesters, after being held up by their own barrage, eventually moved forward when it lifted, but were held up by heavy machine-gun fire from the German trench. The attacking troops were withdrawn at about 10 a.m., having suffered very severely. From now onwards, during the 13th and 14th of May, various small attacks by one or two companies at a time were organised and delivered, but with no other effect than that of increasing the casualty list. On the night 14/15 May, the Brigade was relieved and a further attack by two companies of still another battalion of a sister Brigade was ordered to take place in the early morning of the 15th. From midnight onwards, however, the enemy shelled Ecoust and the communication trench very heavily with H. E. and gas shells, and at 3.55 a.m.

heavily counter-attacked the advanced line which was driven back through the village to a line which, after being reinforced, was held and consolidated, some distance in the rear. On the night of the 15/16th the Division was relieved.

Here again is an instance of that fatal policy of attempting to attack entrenched positions, strongly and skilfully held by a determined enemy, with inadequate numbers, and of trying to effect with small numbers what has been proved to be incapable of assault by larger forces. The small attack, hastily organised and inadequately prepared, is bound to fail. No gallantry in the world can make up for properly organised support of all kinds; and ample time for preparation is essential to make a success of such an attack against a strong position where no possibility of manœuvre is open to the attacking forces. After the initial success on this occasion, a properly organised attack with sufficient numbers should have been organised to exploit the first step, ample time for its proper organisation being allowed and fresh troops being detailed to make

it; and if possible the troops in the front line, who were in a very uncomfortable situation, and were much exhausted from severe fighting in almost tropical heat, should have been relieved. The fetish for instant action on all occasions does not commend itself when applied to assaulting prepared, entrenched positions which have no flanks to turn; this resolves itself into siege warfare, where positions can only be taken piecemeal and step by step. It is a very different thing in what is known as "open warfare," where quick decision and instant action are so often necessary to seize fleeting opportunities. The constant shelling on this occasion rendered all quick communication impossible; the only way of getting information was by means of orderlies with written messages, a very slow and precarious method; and this alone would have made proper preparations difficult and hurry and dispatch impracticable and dangerous.

Chapter 4 : *The German Offensive—March, 1918*

AFTER returning from France in May, 1917, there came a period of service in England. Although more peaceful and less exacting, it was still a very strenuous time and very little leisure was attached to it.

The post to which the Brigadier was appointed after a short period of leave was the command of the Machine Gun Corps at Grant-ham, and his efforts were concentrated in training and equipping officers and men of that Corps in as short a period as possible, and sending them out to the various fronts fit, as far as time allowed, to take their place in the fighting line. The time allowed was very short—nine to twelve weeks for the men and six to eight weeks for the officers. Not a moment of this could be wasted and training was, of course, continuous and exacting ;

but it served its purpose, and as the wastage all through the summer and autumn of 1917 was very high every effort had to be expended to supply the requisite number of men to make good the deficiencies. At this time too the necessity for change in the organisation of the Machine Gun Corps was becoming more and more apparent, as the scope and utility of these weapons became better understood and more widely appreciated.

The number of machine guns in a Division had been gradually increased since the war started from two guns per battalion, making a total of twenty-four in the Division, to sixteen guns per Brigade, making forty-eight guns to the Division. The old Machine Gun Section (two guns) of the battalions had been done away with and replaced by Lewis guns with each platoon, and the machine guns had been organised, very wisely, into a separate Corps. But it was essential, to get the full effect of these weapons, that they should be capable of being used collectively and not frittered away piecemeal attached to Brigades. After much discussion and a certain amount

of opposition, it was finally decided to organise the Machine Gun Companies into Battalions of four companies of sixteen guns each, making a total of sixty-four to a Division, which would then become part of the Divisional Troops, where they would be properly administered and trained by a senior officer who would also become, *ex officio*, the Machine-Gun Adviser to the Divisional General. This change of organisation was worked out at Grantham, in conjunction with the Machine Gun School at Camiers in France, and meant a considerable amount of work for the staff at both places. That the change was a wise one, and more than justified itself during the whole of the fighting in 1918, must be admitted by even its most bitter opponents.

In February, 1918, the Brigadier relinquished his appointment at Grantham, preparatory to taking over a Brigade in France, and on March 16 left England for that purpose. On arrival he was posted to the 110th Brigade of the 21st Division, and after a night spent at Boulogne, he left by train for Amiens, with the vaguest idea as to where the Division was ;

he only knew that a car would meet him at Amiens station to take him on his way. On arriving at Amiens among the throng which were congregated in the station yard, he found with some difficulty the car in charge of a smart man with a very broad Scotch accent and a pair of piercing black eyes which twinkled in an extraordinary way, and who evidently had a keener sense of humour than his countrymen are generally supposed to possess. He was destined to drive the Brigadier on many other occasions of a less pleasant character, as he remained with the Division till it was demobilised in April, 1919. After lunching at the old familiar Godbert Restaurant, the Brigadier proceeded on his way, the driver informing him that Divisional Headquarters were at Longavesnes and that the 110th Brigade were at that moment in the line with headquarters at Saulcourt, which meant that they were on the ground where the German counter-attack, after the Battle of Cambrai in November, 1917, took place.

Late in the afternoon he arrived at Divisional Headquarters, which consisted of a series of the usual wooden huts on the sheltered side of

a low ridge and provided with mined dug-outs as protection against aerial bombing, which at that time was common in this part of the line. As it was getting late, the Divisional Commander arranged for the Brigadier to stay the night at Divisional Headquarters and take over the command of his Brigade the next morning, which, as he had been travelling since 7 o'clock that morning, he was very pleased to do. This rest, by the way, was productive of many good results when viewed by the light of subsequent events, as it enabled the Brigadier to make acquaintance with the Staff, and it also gave him the opportunity of hearing from the Divisional Commander his views on the situation as it stood and discussing various other questions which are so necessary for a good understanding between a Divisional Commander and his Brigadiers. The situation, on the whole, was a sufficiently grave one; the extent of front held by the Division, with two Brigades in the line and one in reserve, was appallingly large, more especially considering that the Brigades were weak—for already each had been depleted of one battalion

and the remainder were not up to strength.

The weakness of the Division dated from the latter end of 1917, when the strength of battalions was so much reduced owing to there being an insufficient number of recruits forthcoming to keep them up to strength, that it was decided to disband a certain number of battalions so as to strengthen the remainder. At the same time it was decided not to alter the number of Divisions, so that the only other alternative was to reduce the strength of the Brigades; the latter were therefore reduced from four to three battalions, making the infantry strength of a Division ten battalions instead of thirteen. Apart from the loss of strength, this decision—from a Brigadier's point of view—was very unfortunate, as the difficulties of inter-battalion reliefs were thereby increased. It can easily be seen that, with four battalions in the Brigade, two could be placed in the front line, leaving one in support and one in reserve, these latter two relieving the front line battalions which, in their turn, became support and reserve. With three battalions however this was not so, because

it almost invariably occurred that two battalions were in the front line, leaving only one for relieving purposes, and thus making it imperative to keep one of the front line battalions a longer time in the line. Incidentally, too, it was a great waste of Staff, as it was just as easy to administer and command four or even five battalions as three.

Added to this loss of strength, in spite of incessant work, which had seriously interfered with the training during the winter, the trenches, which had had to be absolutely remodelled, were not yet finished. The out-post zone and the main line of defence were complete, but the same could not be said for the lines in rear of these. Main routes of telephone communication had been buried but were by no means complete, and the German attack which was clearly foreshadowed by various indications might take place at any moment. Filled with the thoughts of what he had heard, the Brigadier went to bed that night well pleased with what he had seen of his new Division, but little thinking what was in store for him in the course of the next few days.

The 21st Division at this time was commanded by Major-General Sir David Campbell, formerly of the 9th Lancers, with which regiment, and later in command of a cavalry Brigade, he had been through the opening phases of the war. From this cavalry Brigade he had been appointed direct to the command of the 21st Division, which he continued to command till March, 1919. Very quick and alert, with an inexhaustible supply of energy, a great sense of humour and a fund of common sense, he was the perfection of a Divisional Commander. He was very popular with all ranks, and rightly so, as he never spared himself in looking after their comfort and efficiency in every way. Added to which he was a fine soldier, with sound and original ideas on training, and possessed a strong will of his own without being in any way obstinate.

The Division at this time was composed of the 110th, 62nd and 64th Infantry Brigades, commanded respectively by the writer, Brigadier-Generals G. H. Gater and T. Headlam. The Divisional Artillery was commanded by Brigadier-General Newcombe, the C.R.E. being

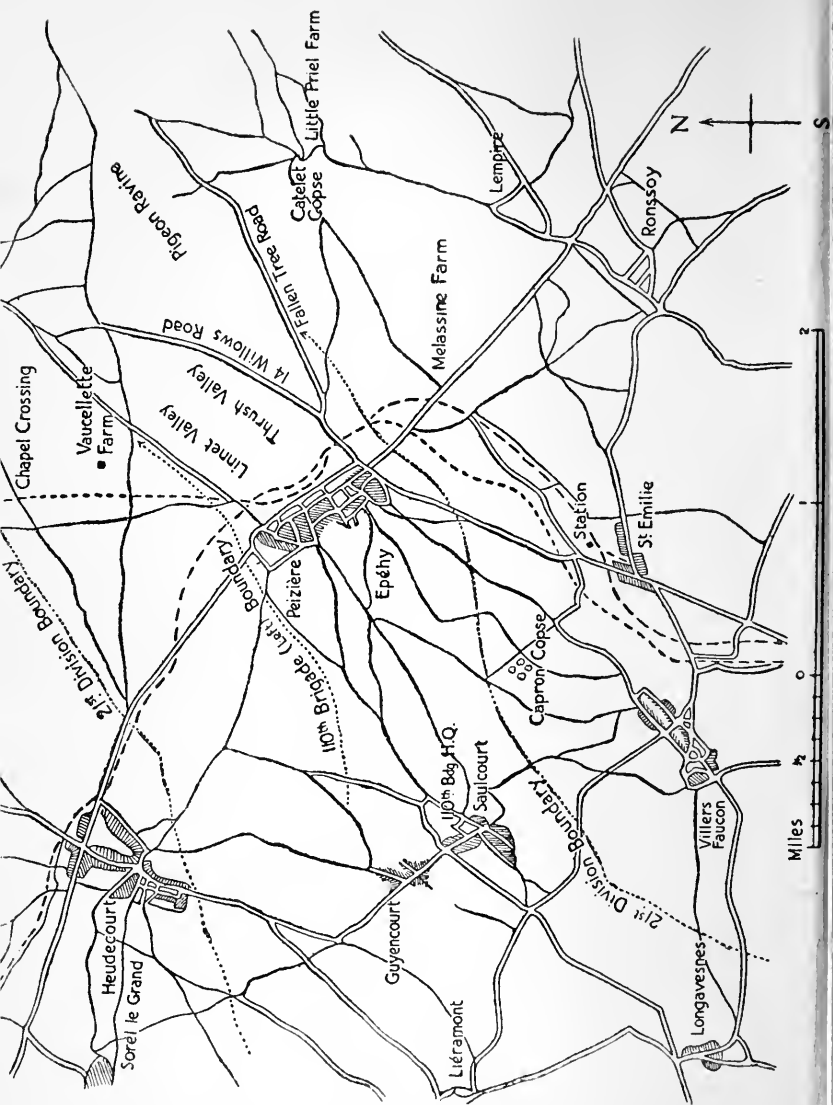
Colonel Addison. General Gater was a product of the New Army; he had never seen or thought of soldiering before the war, but had joined up as soon as it started and had worked up to his present rank. He was a first-class Brigade Commander, very able and quick; indeed it was difficult to imagine him in any other capacity. A delightful companion and a good comrade, he was universally liked throughout the Division.

The 110th Brigade, known as "The Leicester Brigade," was originally made up of the 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th Battalions Leicestershire Regiment. The latter had, however, been disbanded and at this time only the first three were in being. They were a fine, upstanding lot of magnificent fighting men, with exceptional *esprit de corps* and proud of their unofficial title. The Brigade-Major was Major Whittuck, of the Somerset Light Infantry; a very capable officer, with a *sangfroid* which nothing could disturb; and an equally capable Staff Captain was found in Captain Ibbotson, to whom Napoleon's axiom might apply that "Difficulties only arose to be overcome."

The next morning, March 18, the Brigadier bade adieu to Divisional Headquarters and motored to Saulcourt, a ruined village near the line, where, in a sunken road leading from the North-East corner of it, he found his headquarters, comprising a series of "elephant shelters" dug into the bank of the road with a mined dug-out below them; altogether very snug and comfortable quarters, as things went. He thereupon took over the command from the outgoing Brigadier, who had been appointed to the command of a Division and was therefore anxious to get away. After discussing the situation and having shown the positions of the troops on the map and the defensive measures generally which had been taken, General Cayley departed and the relief was complete. Not very much could be done that day, but the rest of the afternoon was spent with the Brigade-Major, going more into details of the defensive scheme and the methods of supply, relief, communications, artillery support, and the thousand and one other details which it behoves a Brigadier to have at his finger-ends and to be thoroughly *au courant*

with if he wishes to keep his finger on the pulse of his command. Various other matters claimed his attention, such as the settling down in his new quarters, making acquaintance with the various members of his staff, having the means of communication thoroughly explained to him by his signal officer and last, but not least, making a prolonged reconnaissance of the Brigade sector from the bank above his headquarters, with field-glasses and telescope whilst the light permitted. He decided that night to commence inspecting the line the following morning and arranged, in company with the Brigade-Major, to see the left half of the line the morning of the 19th and the right half on the 20th, employing the afternoon in seeing the reserve battalion, the transport lines and the various other oddments which go to form the rear line of a Brigade on these occasions. It was a comprehensive programme and meant a very considerable amount of walking, but seeing what the situation was, it was imperative to get some idea of the line and how it was held as quickly as possible, as there was no knowing when the blow might fall. The 7th and 8th

Leicesters were at this time holding respectively the left and right sectors of the front with the 6th Leicesters in reserve at Saulcourt in huts. The extent of the front held by the Brigade was prodigious, although not more so than any other in the 5th Army front. It ran from the Southern extremity of the village to Epéhy, where it joined up with the 16th Division, along the railway cutting which followed its Eastern face, through the village of Peizière to the slopes below Vaucellette Farm, which was held by the 62nd Brigade; a total distance of about 2,100 yards. Every Division and every Brigade in the 5th Army was alike in this respect; is it any wonder that, as Ludendorff discloses in his memoirs, the 5th Army was selected by the German High Command as the point for attack? Is it any wonder that holding, as they were obliged to do, this extended front with eleven weak Divisions, with only three in reserve, they were obliged to give ground when assailed by the weight of superior numbers? The only wonder is that they were not hopelessly broken, as the enemy calculated that they would be. Only



the skilful and determined way in which they were handled by the Army Commander, his wise and soldierlike decision at a critical moment to retire behind the Somme, and the gallant and determined fighting qualities of the rank and file, kept the line intact and prevented the enemy in spite of all his efforts and carefully organised plans from breaking through.

On the 19th and 20th, the Brigadier carried out the programme which he had mapped out, and although the time was all too short for the purpose he managed to see the whole of his forward zone and the main line of resistance, which included the defences of Epéhy and Pezière, and to get a good idea of how his flank joined up with the neighbouring units. Some time was necessarily spent in carefully reconnoitring from the front line trenches of the Outpost Zone the three re-entrant valleys (Linnet Valley, Thrush Valley and Fourteen Willows Road), which led from the German line towards the Epéhy ridge, as they were obvious lines of approach for any hostile attack. During this tour acquaintance with the various commanding officers of units and details of their

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strength and the various defensive measures for which they were responsible were gone into and discussed. There was not time during these two days to do more than take a cursory glance at everything, and it was lucky that so much was able to be done in that brief space, as although handicapped to a large extent by his lack of knowledge of all the details, the Brigadier had seen enough to be able to fight his Brigade with confidence when the blow fell on the following morning, March 21.

During the 19th and 20th the outlook had seemed very peaceful; everything had been quiet, there had been very little shelling and no indication on the surface that anything was in the wind. But from information received beforehand, especially from the statement of two prisoners who had been captured and who on interrogation gave the 21st as the date which had been chosen for the attack, special watchfulness was enjoined on everybody and every precaution of readiness for instant action was taken. Actually the Brigadier was sceptical, but his doubts were rudely dispelled when he was awakened the following morning

at 4.30 a.m. by the crash of the opening bombardment. It came down like a thunderclap on all parts of the line, even as far back as Brigade Headquarters, and left no doubt in any one's mind from its depth and intensity that it meant business.

A hurried move from the shelter to the dug-out was accomplished and, as a considerable proportion of gas shell was being used, gas masks had to be worn and continued to be necessary at intervals during the day, which did not add to the comfort of the proceedings. The morning was cold and damp and a thick mist enveloped everything, so that it was impossible to see any part of the front. Luckily the main telephone lines were buried, so that communication with the front line and the observation posts in Epéhy was possible, but even these could not see much, owing to the mist. For six hours the bombardment continued, and it was not until 10.30 a.m. that any infantry attack developed; then a general attack along the whole line took place and, favoured by the fog, the enemy penetrated the forward zone in several places but were eventu-

ally driven out again. It was evident from the first that the Boches were employing a new form of tactics, pushing forward light machine guns which opened the way for small parties of infantry advancing under cover of their fire; where these bodies met with determined opposition the attack was not forced, but wherever there was a gap or the opposition was able to be overcome, there the attack was pressed and reinforcements directed. Thus a system of infiltration was established and the strong points were gradually surrounded and cut off. This was a very difficult system to combat, as, owing to the shortage of numbers, it was necessary to occupy the extensive front in a series of small posts mutually supporting each other. The mist however rendered this mutual support difficult, hence this infiltration was more successful than it otherwise would have been, with the consequence that parts of the line were penetrated. Epéhy and Peizière were defended by a series of strong points in the villages themselves; these had separate garrisons, were well wired, and disposed for mutual support of one another. The position

was further strengthened by a strong machine-gun defence from the rear and flanks and a converging artillery barrage so arranged as to sweep these valleys at irregular intervals as they formed obvious forming-up places for the attacking troops ; and it is quite possible that this bore good fruit, as the frontal attacks on Epéhy and Peizière did not develop to any extent for some considerable period. During the morning, at about 11 a.m. the enemy apparently filtered through the battalion on the left and a strong party entered Peizière ; a local counter-stroke by the 7th Leicesters, assisted by two tanks, however, drove them out successfully. At noon the main line of resistance was still intact and part of the forward zone remained in our hands, but both flanks were considerably threatened and reports from these directions of bombing enterprises on the part of the enemy went to show that all was not well there. Especially was this the case on the right where as far as could be ascertained there was a considerable gap. The telephone lines were still working with the forward Observation Post, and by this means a very fair

idea of the situation was obtained. At 3 p.m. a heavy attack developed from Linnet and Thrush Valleys against the right (8th Leicesters). The line, however, remained intact, but the situation on the extreme flank, where the 16th Division joined up, was very critical as the enemy appeared to have broken through at this point and in conformity with their plan, as sketched above, were pushing past it towards St. Emilie. The Brigadier therefore ordered up the 6th Leicesters to form a defensive flank, pivoting on the South edge of Epéhy, towards Saulcourt; and later they were reinforced from the Divisional Reserve by two companies R.E., three machine guns and a company of the 1st E. Yorks. Regt. And so the day wore on towards evening, and still the line was intact and the defensive flank holding its own; but disquieting rumours of the enemy pushing down the St. Emilie Road caused much anxiety to the Brigadier. The position on the left flank was most satisfactory, as although Vaucellette Farm ridge had been taken yet Chapel Hill was still in our hands and the 12th/13th Northumberland Fusiliers

were echeloned in rear of the Railton-Peizière Railway. At 10.30 p.m. the fight had died down and as far as the Brigade front was concerned everything was *in statu quo*, except that the forward posts had gone—after a desperate fight from which unfortunately few returned. They undoubtedly broke up the enemy's attack on more than one occasion, prevented him from making an organised assault on the main line of resistance of Epéhy, and remained at their posts until entirely surrounded. Even then, from reports received late in the afternoon, they were still holding out. It is difficult to say when or how they ceased to exist, but nothing could be finer than their performance and no words of praise are adequate for such men. Their epitaph lies in the text of the German Communiqué, which said: "The Leicester Brigade at Epéhy gave us the most trouble."

So the hours of darkness came, hours full of anxiety and work. There was no sleep for anybody, as there was much work to be done, reports to be received, orders sent out and rations to be arranged for; and the oppor-

tunity was taken of sending everything in the way of impedimenta to the rear, out of the way. The next morning (22nd) was still misty. At 6.45 a.m. a heavy bombardment commenced on the front line and to the rear of it, and about 8.15 a.m. the S.O.S. signal went up from Epéhy where the enemy was developing a heavy infantry attack on the Southern defences of the village, at the same time pushing an attack from the direction of the Epéhy-St. Emilie road against the defensive flank; the latter attack extended as far as St. Emilie on the 16th Divisional Front. This attack was stoutly resisted, and fierce fighting at close quarters took place in and around the Southern portion of the village. Eventually the Southern group of posts were surrounded and captured, and the left of the defensive flank had to be withdrawn slightly to the North-West in consequence. At 9 a.m. the attack on this flank grew stronger and orders were sent for the line to withdraw North-Westwards to a line Capron Copse—Saulcourt. Lieut.-Colonel Stewart, D.S.O., commanding the 6th Leicesters, a very gallant officer and a

great loss, was killed just before the withdrawal took place. By 10 a.m. the movement was complete, the 7th Leicesters still holding the main line of resistance and the village of Peizière. At 11 a.m. orders were received from the Division for the Brigade to withdraw in rear of the reserve Brigade, who were in position along the Saulcourt—St. Emilie line, and reorganise near the aerodrome at Longavesnes. To comply with these orders was not an easy matter. The enemy was pressing the defensive flank, the Southern defences of Epéhy had gone and the remainder were in close touch with the Boche, if not already surrounded. The enemy had occupied St. Emilie and were pressing on down the Villers Faucon road. It seemed doubtful if the unit would be able to disentangle itself from such close grips and then make its way out through the gap that was left. The Brigadier issued orders for the Brigade to rendezvous at Longavesnes, the retirement being carried out from the left, the 6th Leicesters to hold on to the flank to enable the 7th and 8th Leicesters to get away. The greatest latitude was left to

Commanding Officers to withdraw their commands in the way best adapted to the changing situation. Headquarters remained at Saulcourt till it was known that the orders had been received and the movement had started. In the meantime the personnel of Brigade H.Q. made up of cooks, servants, signallers, etc., were formed into a fighting formation and took their places in the Reserve Line which ran immediately in front of the H.Q., to fill a gap which existed where one of the battalions of the reserve Brigade had not yet arrived. At about 12 noon, the Brigadier with his staff, in small separate parties, moved to Longavesnes, there to await the Brigade. This journey was by no means a pleasant one as a considerable area in front of Saulcourt through which their pathway lay was being heavily barraged by the enemy; considerable practice in shell-dodging was obtained, but the passage was successfully carried out, with no casualties. The personnel of H.Q. were ordered to follow as soon as they were relieved, but owing to the exigencies of the situation they were unable to leave till the Reserve Line was evacuated

during the afternoon, when the remnant eventually joined up. The consequence was that the Brigade, for the remainder of the operations, was left with very few signallers and none of their equipment, which proved a great handicap in the strenuous days that followed. In spite of the close proximity of the enemy, who followed up the retirement of the defensive flank, the operation was successfully accomplished and was complete by 1.30 p.m., although stragglers who had got lost or been temporarily cut off continued to come in for some time afterwards. Lieut.-Colonel Utterson, D.S.O., 8th Leicesters, however, and the greater part of the surviving garrison of Epéhy were missing, having been, as was afterwards ascertained, surrounded and captured. The remnants of the battalions were rapidly formed up and reorganised as they arrived. The majority of the 8th Leicesters had disappeared and the 6th and 7th had both suffered heavily. The men were given a meal of sorts and a rest; but not for long, as orders were received at 3.30 for the Brigade to withdraw to Aizecourt-le-Haut, to act as reserve

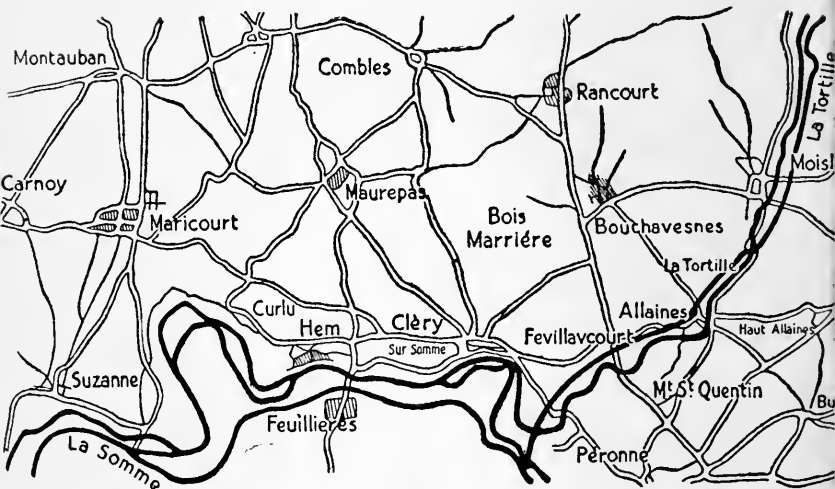
to the remainder of the Division, who were to hold a line East of Templeux-la-Fosse. By 7.30 that evening the Brigade were settled in their bivouacs, dog-tired and weary with the march after their strenuous exertions of the previous days. The battalions were ordered to get as much rest as possible but to be ready to turn out at a moment's notice; and, sure enough, during the night the situation East of Curlu Wood, on what was known as the Green Line, became very critical and the Brigade was ordered to come into position on the left of the 62nd Brigade by 4.30 a.m. on the 23rd, with the 9th Division prolonging the line to the North. The battalions of the Brigade were by this time so reduced that they were temporarily merged into one, and placed under the command of Lieut.-Colonel Sawyer, D.S.O. of the 7th Battalion. The 14th Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers (Pioneers) shortly afterwards joined the Brigade and acted with it during the remainder of the operation. At 6.40 a.m. the enemy opened with his artillery on the Green Line and the main Aizecourt-Curlu road, and his infantry

commenced to push forward. At 8 a.m., acting on orders received, the Brigade fell back on an old trench line running from the Peronne-Curlu road, East of Aizecourt-le-Haut, towards Moislains, the line South of the road being held by the 64th Brigade; the 62nd Brigade occupied the part East of Aizecourt. From now onwards, their strength being so much reduced, the 62nd and 110th Brigades amalgamated and acted under the joint orders of the two Brigadiers. About 10 a.m. both flanks of their position were turned, and the troops holding it fell back to the high ground at Haut Allaines, the 6th, 7th and 8th Leicesters retiring through Moislains in conformity with the movement.

It was about this time that a very exciting incident befel the Brigadier. While on the heights close to Haut Allaines, where the joint Brigade H.Q. were temporarily established, just before the troops started to retire from their positions at Aizecourt, touch with the Division was required to report the situation and obtain orders for further movements. For this purpose the Brigadier, attended by his

A BRIGADIER IN FRANCE

orderly, rode rapidly back through the village to the cross-roads about a mile to the West, where the 64th Brigade H.Q. were situated, and where it was known that telephone connection was established with Divisional H.Q.

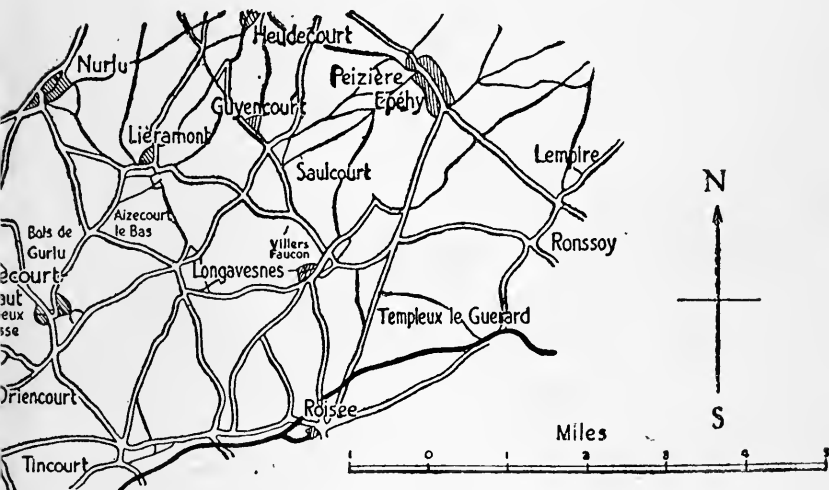


THE GERMAN OFFENSIVE, SFCO

On arrival he was able to converse with the Divisional Commander and having got all the information he could, he started back without losing a moment to where he imagined he would find his H.Q. Some time of course had

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elapsed before he had started back and in the meantime the enemy had pushed rapidly forward, the two Brigades with their headquarters having been compelled to retire across the canal, leaving the village to be occupied



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by the enemy. Quite unaware of this situation, he was cantering through when suddenly he was fired at at comparatively short range, one bullet hitting his horse just in front of the saddle. Rapidly realising the situation, he

turned his horse and shouted to his orderly to turn and gallop as hard as he could. Every moment the firing grew more intense and, while turning, both horses were again hit but luckily without breaking a bone. A wild gallop out of the village, followed by a regular fusillade which, however, did not do any further damage, brought them to shelter round an angle in the road and the horses, mortally wounded though they were, were stout-hearted enough to continue till the village was left well in the rear. Having put a sufficient distance between them and the village, the Brigadier pulled up and sending his orderly on towards Cléry-sur-Somme with the horses, with orders to shoot them, he started to walk across country and eventually rejoined his H.Q. who had retired to the high ground west of the canal, overlooking Moislains. The orderly took the horses back, but the Brigadier's horse died on the way, and the other was shot shortly afterwards. Both riders owed their lives, and certainly their freedom, to the gallant way in which, although badly wounded, the horses had kept up sufficiently to carry them out of danger.

By 12 noon the whole Division had crossed the Canal and had taken up a position on the ridge overlooking it, with the right of the 64th Brigade on Cléry-sur-Somme. The enemy were now in possession of the East bank of the canal and their artillery was causing considerable losses to the transport which had got jammed on the Cléry road, as the devastated country of the old Somme battlefield rendered movement across country impossible for wheeled traffic. Unluckily the Brigade Headquarters wagons were blown up, with the result that Brigade H.Q. were left with nothing but what they stood up in—not that that mattered very much at the moment, but its effects were felt very much in days to come. Later in the afternoon a further retirement was made to higher ground East of Bouchavesnes, but shortly afterwards, finding that both flanks were in the air, the Brigadier withdrew the line to the Bois Marrière ridge, where touch was obtained with the 64th Brigade North of Cléry; no junction, however, with the 9th Division to the North could be obtained. The remnants of the two Brigades (62nd and 110th)

were now retiring on the upland country North of the Cléry road—a blank desolated area, where it was impossible, owing to lack of necessary equipment, to get touch or get into communication except by runners, so that during this period no information or orders were received, and the force under the Brigadier had to act on its own initiative, endeavouring as far as possible to conform to the general movement. Carrying out this idea during the night of the 23rd/24th, the Brigadier withdrew the force to a line one thousand yards West of the Bois Marrière ridge, and by this means, early in the morning, gained touch again with the 64th Brigade and eventually with the 9th Division. At 7 a.m. that morning, the 21st Division was holding the line East of Cléry, overlooking the Cléry-Feuillaucourt canal to a point South of the Bouchavesnes-Mt. St. Quentin road, where it joined with the 9th Division. Between 9 and 10 that morning, Cléry village was taken by the enemy and the 64th Brigade were withdrawn to a line running West of Cléry and North-West of Hem Wood. Earlier in the morning a staff officer arrived from the

Division bringing orders and information of the situation, together with news that fresh troops were coming up to relieve them, and between 11 and 12 noon a Brigade of the 35th Division arrived to take over the line West of Cléry from the 64th Brigade, while the 110th and 62nd Brigades retired to the ridge two miles South-East of Maurepas. Up till now the Brigade H.Q. of both the 62nd and 110th Brigades had been merged in the front line, but they were now ordered back to Hem Wood, where they remained for the greater part of the day, orders being sent out by runners and touch with the Division at Maricourt being once more established by telephone, which made things much easier. During the afternoon orders were received for the relief of the Division by the 35th, and later the Brigades withdrew to the Maurepas-Curlu line and subsequently viâ Maricourt to Suzanne where they halted for the night and battalions were reorganised as far as possible. Early next morning (25th) the whole Division moved to Bray-sur-Somme, where a composite Brigade, under Brigadier-General Headlam, of the 64th

Brigade, was organised, made up of a composite battalion from each Brigade, which eventually took up a position from Bray to Dernancourt, between the Somme and the Ancre. Having organised and handed over the battalion, Brigade H.Q. late in the evening proceeded to Sailly-le-Sec, where they spent the night. The roads during this march were filled with troops and guns retiring Westwards and mingled with the rest were crowds of country people moving in the same direction accompanied by every sort of vehicle, from farm carts to perambulators, conveying as much of their household treasures as they could. It was a sad sight to see, as nearly all of them were old men and women accompanied by very young children, to whom a journey of this kind must have been a great hardship, more especially as this was the second time they had had to do it. If it had not been for the tragedy of it, it was almost laughable to see what the loads on the carts were chiefly composed of. Apparently the most treasured possessions were beds, and it was chiefly with these bulky articles that the carts were loaded. What help could be afforded

to them was given in the way of transport, but it was doubtful if they all got away as a large proportion of them were very feeble and could neither move fast nor far.

In the early morning of the 26th, the nucleus parties of the three battalions, the last remaining part of the Brigade, were organised as a company, and, together with similar ones from other Brigades, were formed into a battalion under Lieut.-Colonel McCulloch and sent to take up a position South of Morlancourt. The same morning Brigade H.Q. were ordered to Heilly, where the Brigadier was to organise a Brigade. On arrival he found an Entrenching battalion and a mass of men collected from drafts, men returning from leave, and a certain number of stragglers. These he organised into a "Highland" battalion from the drafts of the 9th Division and a "Draft" battalion from the remainder; and these with the Entrenching battalion made up the Brigade. The Brigade, when organised, was to occupy a line from Ribemont-sur-Ancre to Heilly; subsequent orders were however received to take up the line of the old trench system running

from Ribemont to Sailly-le-Sec. The 2nd Cavalry Division, under General Mullins, had by this time arrived ; they took up a position in front of this line, and were in touch with the troops on the South of the Somme, so that information regarding the situation on that side was forthcoming. The situation was none too rosy, and the enemy were pressing hard South of the Somme, where there were only tired and disorganised troops to oppose them. Reinforcements were on their way but had not yet arrived, and the line was now getting dangerously close to Amiens. North of the river, too, there were no fresh troops to oppose a determined effort on the part of the enemy. It was an anxious time, especially for the Brigadier, with a hastily organised and unknown force under his command, and with an attack of unknown strength imminent at any moment. By the early morning of the 27th the Brigade was firmly established in position, and during the night Lieut.-Colonel McCulloch's force had also arrived and entrenched itself in rear. At 11.30 a.m. the 11th Australian Brigade arrived by lorry and that afternoon took over

the front line, the Brigadier's force withdrawing into immediate support in rear of them. The Australian troops were a magnificent body of men, fresh and well-trained as they came straight from six weeks' rest and training near the sea and had been rushed up by lorry to reinforce this part of the front. The Brigades were well up to strength, and their Brigadier and all his staff appeared to be particularly alert and capable. They were eventually able completely to get the upper hand of the Boche, who lived in terror of them; and when the advance took place later in the year they went through in fine style.

Brigade H.Q. moved from Heilly Chateau, which was taken over by the 11th Australian Brigade, to the Lime Kilns on the Corbie road—a more central position, but unthinkably dirty and uncomfortable. The day was a comparatively peaceful one; nothing happened on our immediate front, although the 3rd Australian Division had issued orders for the Brigadier's force to be prepared to attack in the direction of Sailly-le-Sec in case of need. The necessity never arose, much to the Briga-

dier's relief, as the idea of attacking with tired and newly organised battalions without any means of transport was not attractive. The situation in the afternoon about Sailly and South of the Somme was cleared up by the cavalry and the enemy made no effort that day in that direction. On the 28th, the Brigadier's force was relieved by another Brigade of the 3rd Australian Division, with orders for all details to rejoin their Divisions. Brigade Headquarters moved to Behencourt, where the "details" of the Brigade had already gone. During the night 28th/29th the Brigade was ordered to furnish a composite battalion to form part of another Composite Brigade of the Division, which was to be under the command of General Gater and was to move to a position East of Baizieux if required; but again the necessity never arose. On the evening of the 29th the Brigade moved to Allonville, and during the march, under sudden orders issued by the Corps, the Composite Brigade under General Gater was diverted to la Neuville to support the 3rd Australian Division. So once more the Brigadier was minus his Brigade, and

arrived at Allonville very late in the evening in pitch darkness, where he had some difficulty in finding his Headquarters. Eventually he was lucky enough to get some dinner at Divisional Headquarters, whither he went to report the departure of the Composite Brigade—the first decent meal he had had for nine days.

On the 30th, General Gater's Brigade came in, not having been required ; and the following day General Headlam's force and Colonel McCulloch's arrived and all details rejoined their Brigades which were at once reorganised into battalions, wofully attenuated, averaging little over 200 fighting men each battalion.

Thus ended, as far as the 21st Division was concerned, the German Offensive on this part of the front. By the help of reinforcements, both French and British, the tired and shattered Divisions were relieved, and the line stabilised practically on the same positions on which they had finished up. A certain amount of devastated country had been lost, but otherwise not much harm had been done. The line had never been broken, the enemy had failed to interpose between the allied armies,

and although under fire of his guns, Amiens had not been taken "according to plans". Looked at in this light, the German Offensive was a failure, and a costly one, but its failure was due solely to the fighting qualities of the troops and the able handling of the 5th Army by its Commander.

It proved the impossibility of defending a position, thinly held, with a paucity of reserves, against a well-organised attack in superior numbers. The fallacy of trying to hold defensive positions with a series of posts instead of a connected line was exposed and the policy, although rendered necessary by circumstances, was shown to be unsound, more especially with only partially trained troops. The uses of light and heavy machine guns both in attack and defence were clearly exemplified, especially their power when ably handled in attack, as it was in great measure due to them that the German infantry were able to pursue their tactics of infiltration. The necessity for defence in depth by machine guns was clearly shown on many occasions, also for this defence in depth to be maintained throughout a retire-

ment, being carried out by echeloning those weapons and carrying out a rearward movement by successive "leap-frogging". At Epéhy the machine guns placed on the flanks of Epéhy and Peizière broke up the attack by their barrage fire and materially assisted the defence. By their position on the flanks, they were also enabled to turn their attention to the flank attacks and prevent their developing. It also demonstrated the necessity for the machine guns of a Division to be worked under one command, and for that commander to be in close touch with the Division, so as to carry out the wishes of the Divisional Commander in co-operation with the other arms.

One thing that appeared surprising was that the enemy made no attempt to use his cavalry, although on several occasions if boldly handled they must have had opportunities of acting with direful results on the weary infantrymen. The British cavalry, on the other hand, when they arrived, did yeoman service in checking the advancing enemy.

As for the fighting men themselves, no words can express the admiration evoked by their

doggedness and tenacity in circumstances which would have tried and might have demoralised the best and highest trained troops. There may have been instances of their leaving positions too soon, but this, when it occurred, was due to sheer fatigue and the lack of sufficient officers in the later stages. There were no signs of panic at any time ; if they retired they simply walked away and could be stopped and brought up again with no difficulty if there was any one to lead them. They were handicapped severely by lack of that training which they ought to have had during the winter months. This was inevitable, however, owing to the enormous amount of work which had had to be done in constructing a new line over an enormous front and making successive lines in rear of it. Training under these circumstances had to go to the wall. The fault lay, if fault it were, in taking over more front than we had troops to occupy it with—in fact, to use an Americanism, we had “ bitten off more than we could chew.”

Chapter 5 : *The 4th Battle of Ypres—April, 1918*

THE 21st Division came out of the fighting described in the previous chapter considerably knocked about and with greatly depleted numbers, but with their moral and confidence unshaken. Although they had been obliged to make a retrograde movement, it had been carried out with steadiness and discipline, the front had remained unbroken and there was no doubt that heavy losses had been inflicted by them on the enemy. New drafts of men were quickly forthcoming to fill the vacancies but these were of course comparatively raw, and to a certain extent untrained, although good material if time could be given to let them settle down and be properly organised and trained with their battalions. This respite was, however, from force of circumstances not procurable. The Division was sent straight

from the Somme to the 2nd Army and eventually to the Ypres area where another Boche attack commenced, and fighting of the fiercest description took place shortly after its arrival. The Division was handicapped severely by its inability to train and rest the harassed battalions of the Brigades. They nevertheless rose nobly to the occasion, and throughout one of the biggest battles which entailed a considerable amount of movement it was wonderful how the recently joined recruits fell into the scheme of things, acting and fighting like veterans in maintaining the already high reputation of the Division. Both the 62nd and 64th Brigades were detached to other Divisions for certain purposes shortly after the fighting started, and it was not till towards the end that the 62nd Brigade returned. In the meanwhile the Division was made up of Brigades from other Divisions which were attached to it for varying periods, the 21st Brigade, the 39th Division Composite Brigade and the 89th Brigade being used for this purpose at different times.

On the afternoon of April 1, the 110th Brigade left Allonville and marched to Amiens.

FOURTH BATTLE OF YPRES

where it entrained that evening and proceeded to a place in the 2nd Army Area appropriately called Hopoutre and thence marched to Locre. It was far from being a pleasant journey. In the first place the Boche airmen had been making a target of the St. Roch station in Amiens, where they entrained, and while the entrainment was in progress it was quite on the cards that the station might be bombed from the air at any minute. When the Brigadier's train came to start something went wrong and it was kept for three hours in the station before finally getting under way. That time of waiting was rather trying, as there seemed to be no particular object in waiting in such a very exposed place and an accurate attack would have been disastrous. However there was nothing to be done, and eventually the train moved off, to every one's great relief, the airmen not paying a visit that night. The discomfort of these railway journeys was intense; the rolling stock used for the purpose was by no means first class and a journey of thirty-six hours in a filthy carriage of a suburban train type was no luxury. Apparently the trains

were used to such an extent that any idea of cleaning them was impossible. On this occasion the carriage was so filthy that all hands had to set to to clean it as best they could before starting. In these circumstances the Brigade H.Q. mess-corporal, the admirable Eldridge, always surpassed himself by producing meals in the most extraordinary way; how he did it was always a marvel to every one. On arrival at Locre Brigade H.Q. were quartered in a little house near the hospital which a few weeks later became part of the battle area, with the usual result of reducing it to a heap of ruins. On April 4 the 21st Division relieved the 1st Australian Division on the Wytschæte-Messines ridge with the 62nd and 64th Brigades in the line and the 110th Brigade in reserve at Fairy House, to which place they moved on the 4th. On the 7th however the Division was relieved by the 19th Division and was ordered to take over the Menin road sector East of Ypres, from the 49th Division. The Brigade moved therefore to La Clytte on the 7th, and to Quebec Camp on the 8th. While this latter move was in progress the Brigadier and his Brigade

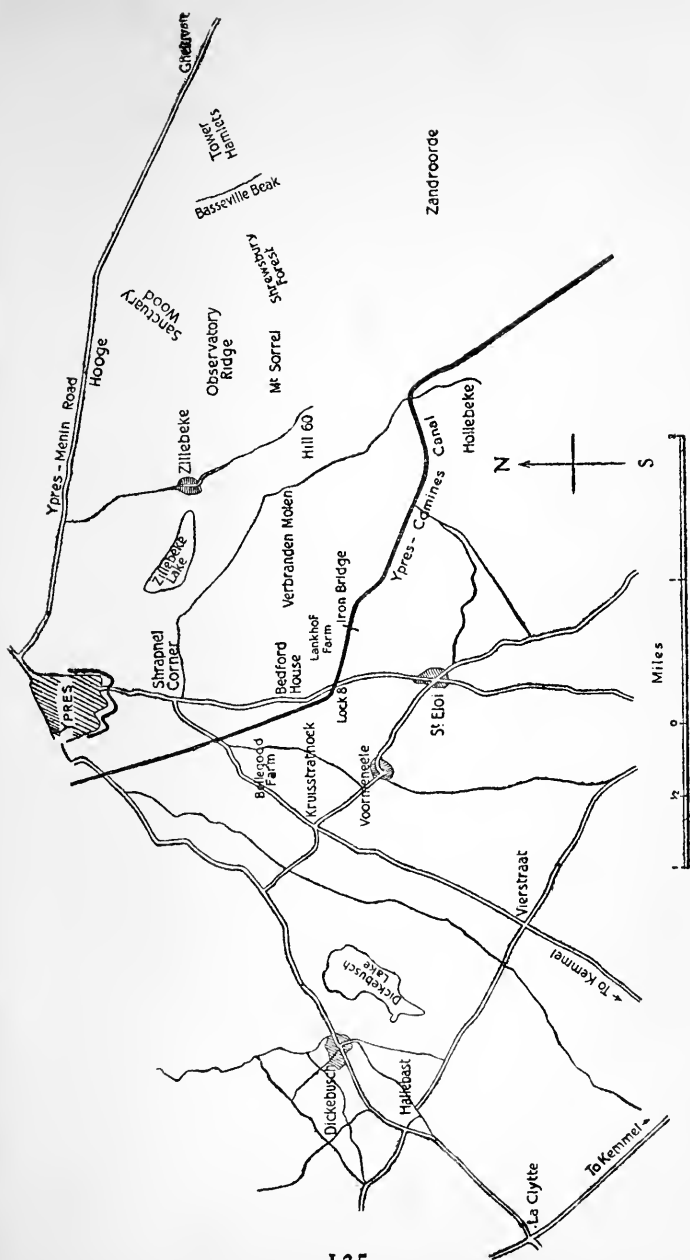
FOURTH BATTLE OF YPRES

Major went by motor-car to reconnoitre and make arrangements for relieving the 148th Brigade in the line. They found the H.Q. of this Brigade in a series of huts just North of Zillebeke Lake on Warrington Road and the Brigadier, General Green Wilkinson, turned out to be an old friend of South African War days. Here arrangements for the relief were worked out and all details with regard to the defence of the sector explained and discussed. There was no time that day actually to reconnoitre the line, but the commanding officers of the battalions, together with the company officers of the battalion actually taking over the front line, were sent to reconnoitre with the respective battalions which they were to relieve. Everything was very quiet and peaceful—but it was not to remain so for long.

On the following night, the 9th/10th, the Brigade took over the line, the 6th Leicesters, now commanded by Lieut.-Colonel Chance (5th Lancers), relieving the 5th York and Lancs. Regt. in the front line on Tower Hamlets ridge, the 8th Leicesters in support at Zillebeke Lake and the 7th Leicesters in reserve at Scottish

Wood. A battalion of 22nd Corps troops, composed of Australian Light Horse and New Zealand Cyclists, were already in the line in the right subsector of the Brigade front and became attached to the Brigade. The move up to the line was carried out by light railway which saved the troops a very long march, and was a great help in every way. The relief went off without incident during the evening and, owing to the able arrangements of the 148th Brigade, was completed before midnight.

The forward system of the line held by the Brigade comprised a fairly well-developed though irregular trench system East of the Basseville Beke on Tower Hamlets ridge as far as the Menin Road on the left battalion front. On the right it consisted of a line of posts West of the Basseville Beke which connected up with the outpost line of the 9th Division on the right, North of the canal. A support line ran in rear along the spur overlooking the Basseville Beke valley. The marshy ground in this valley formed a serious obstacle against any attack from the East, but it also precluded any direct junction between the left and right



THE FOURTH BATTLE OF YPRES (April, 1918).

subsectors—a disadvantage partially met by a system of signalling across the valley.

The morning of April 10 practically saw the commencement of the 4th Battle of Ypres. The enemy commenced on this day that pressure which led up to the violent attack culminating in the taking of Wyschæte and Messines and later Mt. Kemmel, threatening the Scherpenberg and the Mont des Cats, with Hasebrouck as the objective—the capture of which would have necessitated the evacuation of Ypres. The thrust which started to the South of the salient eventually spread Northwards, the most Northerly portions of it finally reaching the Southern defences of Ypres itself between Zillebeke Lake and Voormezele. It was a fierce and long-drawn-out struggle, and as the enemy penetrated deeper into the line further South, it became necessary to retire and change front on the Northern part of the line, with Ypres as the pivot. These movements were by no means easy as they had to be carried out under constant and heavy artillery fire and entailed constant vigilance and very hard work on the part of the troops, in the

FOURTH BATTLE OF YPRES

face of an enterprising and active enemy. The battle finally culminated in a violent effort on the enemy's part to straighten out the salient he had formed and make ground Northwards, with which intent he attacked in a North-Westerly direction from Wyschæte towards Ypres; the final phase lasted all through the 27th, 28th, and 29th of April, and ended on the line Hill 60—Voormezeele—Ridge Wood. This critical attack was successfully resisted with very heavy casualties to the enemy, and practically ended the battle as far as this part of the front was concerned.

On the morning of the 10th (the day following the relief of the 49th Division) the enemy, in conjunction with his operations further South, started heavy shelling of the battery positions round Zillebeke Lake and all the roads and tracks leading to the front line. The support battalion was in an exposed situation in a hut camp near the lake, so, partly to obtain shelter for them and partly as a precautionary measure, they were ordered to move up to dug-outs in Observation ridge—Tor Top and Canada tunnels. The Brigade H.Q. itself

was not in a very happy position, being exposed in huts on Warrington Road in the centre of the shelled area. They bore with it for some time, but the following day after several high velocity shells had come very near and one had pitched within ten yards of the mess hut (luckily in a shell hole full of mud and water), the Brigadier decided that it was time to move, and shifted Headquarters to the dam which ran along the West side of Zillebeke Lake, where a certain amount of shelter could be obtained, although even there it was more moral than material; however it was a decided improvement. The Divisional Pioneers were in occupation of these shelters at the time, but with the greatest good will gave up a sufficient number of them to accommodate the party; Colonel Weyman, who commanded them, was particularly helpful and unselfish in assisting to carry out the change. There had always been a particularly good understanding with the Divisional Pioneers since the time when during the Somme Battle they became part of the Brigade for a short while.

On the night of the 11th/12th, the 7th

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Leicesters relieved the 22nd Corps composite regiment in the right subsector. The composite regiment went back to Scottish Wood in reserve, but the following day were taken away and sent to another part of the front, thus reducing the Brigade to three battalions again, a loss of strength which at that particular moment could ill be afforded. On the same night (11th/12th) the enemy attempted to raid an isolated post of the 6th Leicesters, but the attack was beaten off and a sergeant of the 393rd Regiment was left dead on our wire, which was a very valuable identification.

Nothing of importance happened during the next two days, but big things were taking place further South and the news was grave concerning the progress of the enemy's attack. On the 15th orders were received to withdraw the line from the forward positions to a line South of Zillebeke Lake, running just North of French Farm to Convent Lane, connecting on the left with the 6th Division, the right being continued to Snipers Barn by the 39th Division Composite Brigade attached to the Division. The new position to be taken

up was organised on the Brigade front as an outpost zone and a main line of resistance, the former consisting of the line already indicated, with supporting points in the rear, and the latter being the old G.H.Q. line running parallel with the road from Shrapnel Corner to Kruisstraat Hoek. This latter was an old line which had been dug in 1917 and had now partially fallen in and required digging out; but still it was there, which was something. The outpost defences had to be constructed, and there was much to be done, but very little time to do it in.

The withdrawal was carried out that night (15th/16th), the two front line battalions, the 7th and 8th Leicesters, gradually vacating their positions after dark, and quietly and carefully retiring through two companies of the 6th Leicesters under Major Burdett, who were left as a rearguard on Observation ridge from Tor Top to Mt. Sorrel; this rearguard remained in position until the new line had been dug and organised for occupation. The same night work was started on the new line and was continued night and day until it was

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completed. Two companies of the 6th and 8th Leicesters were detailed for the purpose and worked with such a will that the line was ready for occupation by the night of the 17th/18th, a very creditable performance. It was then taken over by the 7th and 8th Battalions who occupied the whole system in depth, two companies in the Outpost Zone and two companies in the G.H.Q. line. Meanwhile the two companies of the 6th Leicesters, which were eventually reinforced on the night of the 20th/21st with the remaining two companies of the battalion, had held the rearguard position on Observation ridge till the 23rd, when they were relieved by the 7th Battalion who continued to hold it till they were ordered to withdraw on the 26th. The holding of this isolated position was a very trying and arduous duty, entailing incessant watchfulness and care on the part of all concerned. It was only a skeleton force, scattered over a wide extent of front in small posts with practically no support. It was really a colossal piece of bluff to cover, in the first instance, the construction of the new line; but it was continued for some

time longer as it prevented the enemy from gaining a commanding bit of ground from which observation of the whole area was possible. It proved a most successful device, as the enemy advanced very slowly and cautiously towards it, and it was not until the 17th that he pushed forward and established a general line in front of it. Thenceforward the line was very little molested, except by sniping and trench mortaring (which rendered communication between the posts impossible in daylight), and by an unsuccessful raid on the right post on the night of the 20th/21st, which was beaten off with apparently heavy casualties to the enemy; but he was able in the darkness to remove his wounded.

The situation on the 23rd was rather a curious one on this portion of the front; the 6th Leicesters were holding the forward outpost line, immediately in front of the main line sector held by the 6th Division West of Zillebeke Lake. The continuation of the outpost line on the right from Mt. Sorrel to the Eikhof Farm, South of the Canal, was held by the 21st Brigade with two battalions

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in front and one in reserve, and behind the line was the sector of the new line astride the Canal from French Farm to Convent Lane, held as already described by two battalions of the 110th Brigade. The enemy's artillery action during the whole of this time was very violent and continuous, a large amount of gas shell being used which caused a considerable number of casualties and prevented the troops getting any rest or sleep. Although still only on the fringe of the battle which was raging further to the South, and although no actual infantry action had as yet materialised, still the strain of the constant shelling and the watchfulness required from the liability of attack at any moment was beginning to have its effect on the personnel, who were getting very tired and worn out. No relief was possible but the men, weary as they were, stuck it out manfully and when the actual attack did take place, showed that their stamina was equal to the occasion.

On the 16th Brigade Headquarters moved from Zillebeke Lake to Walker Camp, about a mile to the West of Dickebusch. It was

merely a hut camp round a ruined farm house with no protection except that which was afforded by the standing walls of the house, into which "elephant" shelters protected by sand bags had been introduced, which gave a sense of security and protection against splinters, but could not have withstood a direct hit. Here Headquarters remained for the rest of the time, but as more and more guns took up their position all round it in the vicinity, and of course attracted the enemy's fire, it was not a healthy place of residence, and the Brigadier thought that he was much safer and quieter when he was forward in the line than he was at his own Headquarters.

On the 25th the enemy, after a very heavy bombardment, commenced an attack on a line roughly North-West from the direction of Wyschæte and Kimmel and drove the line held by the 39th Composite Brigade and the 9th Division, to which the 64th Brigade was attached, back to the West of Kruistraat and Kimmel Village, causing the 39th Brigade to form a defensive flank from St. Eloi to Ridge Wood. The 62nd Brigade the same morning

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was moved up to a position of readiness and during the evening sent one battalion to reinforce the 39th Brigade in Ridge Wood, the remaining two battalions continuing the defensive flank to Hallebast Corner. The 62nd Brigade Headquarters and the 39th Composite Brigade Headquarters were accommodated in Walker Camp, which became considerably congested in consequence.

On the 26th the enemy extended his front of attack Northwards and drove in the 21st Brigade, capturing the Bluff and the Spoil Bank. It was in consequence of this acquisition of commanding ground that the 7th Leicesters were ordered to withdraw from Tor Top and retire into Brigade reserve near Hanover House. The situation otherwise remained the same from Voormezeele southwards, although the enemy constantly developed attacks against Ridge Wood and its vicinity which was the scene of some very desperate fighting at close quarters.

On the night of the 27th/28th the 39th and 62nd Brigades were relieved by the 89th Brigade, and the same evening shortly after

dusk a large enemy raiding party about 250 strong surprised and surrounded Lankhof Farm and the four posts East of it. One officer and twenty men fought their way out but the Company Headquarters at Lankhof Farm and about seventy men were missing. The enemy maintained his hold on the position, which stood on higher ground than the adjoining posts, in spite of a counter-attack by a company of the 7th Battalion sent up to eject them. The loss of this part of the line was a very serious one and prevented the relief between the 89th Brigade and the 110th Brigade in that part of the line from Lock 8 to Vimy Post.

On the 28th the enemy attacked Voormezeele, and a desperate fight took place for its possession. The village was taken and retaken twice before it finally remained in Boche hands. After capturing the village, the enemy proceeded to work Northwards up the trench leading to Lock 8, by means of bombing parties which eventually captured Lock 8 by 7 p.m. and occupied Vimy post. Owing to this move a company of the 6th Leicesters

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with one platoon of the 7th Leicesters were obliged to throw back their flanks on both sides of the canal between Lock 8 and the Iron Bridge. The fighting on this day was carried on at close quarters with bayonet, bomb and rifle, and was controlled and carried out chiefly by the junior officers of the battalions concerned with great dash and skill. The local situation was constantly changing and required individual action in carrying out the general scheme without waiting for definite orders; and the training which they had received for this purpose bore fruit here.

The artillery activity of the enemy, which had been gradually increasing in its intensity, culminated on the 29th in a terrific bombardment of the G.H.Q. line, Bedford House area, Ridge Wood, and all battery positions and approaches to the line. This bombardment started about 3 a.m. and at 6 a.m. the infantry assault started; this was chiefly concentrated on Ridge Wood and the G.H.Q. line as far as Kruistraathoek cross roads, and a subsidiary attack also developed on the outpost line along the Canal from Lock 8. The gap

caused by the loss of Vimy post and Lock 8 became increasingly dangerous, so the Brigadier during the morning ordered the withdrawal of the company holding the Canal between Lock 8 and the Iron Bridge, and arranged for a new defensive flank to be formed running from the Iron Bridge across to Bellegoed Farm, which in this way linked up the Bedford House-French Farm line with the G.H.Q. system. This latter operation was carried out by one company of the 7th Leicesters, the supporting battalion, and another from the same battalion was used to relieve the right flank company of the 6th Leicesters in the G.H.Q. line, who had sustained a continuous bombardment mixed with heavy gas shells for two days and had also been strongly attacked, their casualties being particularly heavy and the men dead beat from want of sleep. The fighting round Ridge Wood and its vicinity was of a particularly fierce character, the enemy renewing his efforts again and again ; but the 89th Brigade, assisted by well placed machine guns and with the skilful co-operation of the artillery, successfully beat off all attacks

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and inflicted very severe losses on the enemy.

At 2.30 p.m. the enemy assembled to attack the Iron Bridge, having probably noticed the withdrawal of the post in front of it. The attack was finally broken up and dispersed by combined artillery, machine gun and rifle fire, but not before a considerable amount of hand-to-hand bomb and bayonet work had taken place in the canal bed itself. Splendid work was done here by officers and men alike of the companies of the 6th and 7th Leicesters concerned, and they left their mark on the enemy to such purpose that the attack was not renewed. The 8th Leicesters on the left, as far as French Farm, were also attacked in some force, but had no difficulty in defeating the attempt which was the extreme limit of the attack. The fighting, which had lasted all day, gradually died down about dusk and the night was quiet except for the usual shelling, but even that was not of the intensive character it had been.

During the night of the 29th/30th a company of the 14th Northumberland Fusiliers (Divl. Pioneers) and the 126th Co. R.E.

assisted the Brigade in digging and wiring the new line between the Iron Bridge and Bellegoed Farm, which thus became properly consolidated and constituted a grave menace against any attack from the direction of Voormezelee against the G.H.Q. line.

The 30th passed quietly. The enemy did not renew his attacks, and there was a considerable diminution in the shell fire during the day; and this lull continued during the night when the 58th Brigade relieved the 110th which withdrew to near Busseboom. The relief, although very late, was carried out without incident and with no casualties, and the out-post line was handed over intact. It was nearly 3 a.m. before the Brigadier and his Brigade-Major left their Headquarters, the relief having been reported complete. They were not sorry to see the last of it, as it had proved a most unpleasant refuge. They were both tired and weary to the verge of breaking point as the Brigade had been in action for practically three weeks, from the 10th to the 30th. Although not actually fighting during the whole time the strain on the staff had been

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very severe, and the last three days especially had been a period of strenuous activity with little sleep and constant anxiety. They stumbled along the dark muddy road for about a mile to where the motor-car awaited them on the lee side of a little farm house, the cellars of which had been converted into a field dressing station. There they found the car, but at first nothing would induce it to start, which was trying to overstrained nerves as it was by no means a sheltered spot and had been heavily shelled the day before. However, they eventually got away and a short run over a very bumpy road brought them to their new abode. During the run in the darkness, it was curious to see how narrow and deep the salient appeared. The Boche Véry-lights seemed to be going up from every quarter and the gap through them appeared astoundingly small when seen in this way. Something to eat and drink was ready for them on arrival, and finally a sleep in a more or less comfortable bed, with the additional joy of being able to get into pyjamas—the first time for three weeks!

A BRIGADIER IN FRANCE

The battle continued for a short time longer, but not with the same intensity. The force of the attack had been spent and never revived. Further South the German advance was brought to a halt in no uncertain manner by the 1st Australian Division at Meteren. French reinforcements were rapidly pushed up and the line was stabilised; Wyschæte, Messines and Kemmel remained in Boche hands, but the Scherpenberg and the Mont des Cats were still intact. They never succeeded in getting nearer to Ypres than the outskirts of Ridge Wood and the village of Voormezele, and the line remained where the Brigadier had left it. The Boche remained in the salient he had created, much to his own detriment, until he finally withdrew in the last phase of the war. This attack had cost him very dearly, and except for a slight gain in territory in a most desolated and unpleasant area he had hardly benefited at all.

The practical lessons that could be learnt from this battle were not of a very obvious character in this portion of the front. There had been a certain amount of manœuvring

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which was of extreme value in giving officers and men alike great confidence in themselves and the true infantry weapon—the rifle. The vogue of the bomb had passed, never to return, it was hoped. It showed what a necessity there was for continued training in musketry of all kinds, and in the proper tactical handling of the Lewis gun. What little training had been carried out in the way of teaching the young officers how to handle their platoons had borne fruit an hundredfold and showed that this was the right foundation for future training.

Chapter 6 : *In Champagne, May,* 1918

THE 21st Division was now somewhat war weary. It had taken a prominent part in two important battles, and rest and time to train the new drafts and organise the battalions again seemed to be almost imperative for its well-being and future efficiency. But its labours were by no means over and it was destined to continue its career of martial glory to the bitter end. Wherever it went, North or South, it seemed to be a magnet for drawing the Boche forward to make an attack. It was generally supposed that G.H.Q. really did try to find a quiet spot in the line for the Division to rest in, but fate or that magnetic attraction was too strong and the plan went "all agley".

On arrival at Thieushouk on May 4, it was found that the Division was destined to pro-

ceed Southwards into Champagne and become part of the IX British Corps, reinforcing the 6th French Army, who were holding the sector of line East of Soissons which included Rheims, the Chemin des Dames and the line of the Aisne in its area.

The move was carried out by rail, the 110th Brigade marching to Wizernes, near St. Omer, where it entrained on the afternoon of the 5th, arriving at Lagery on the 6th.

After the desolated area of Ypres and the flat, uninteresting country of Flanders and the North of France, the landscape of Champagne appeared particularly charming—a delightful corner of the real France, peopled by kindly country folk with an old-world courtesy that was a pleasant change. A country of hill and dale, well-watered and wooded and containing such towns as Soissons, Epernay and Rheims, full of historical associations, ancient architecture in its best period—and good wine. The valleys of the Aisne, the Vesle and the Marne are little known to the ordinary traveller, but for beauty of their special kind they are hard to beat, the Marne especially with its

broad, stately river flowing serenely through the deep valley, with a background of rolling uplands as far as the eye can reach. A wonderfully pleasant country to the eye and never more so than during this month of May, when everything was showing the signs of early spring with all its beautiful effects of young greenery and the hint of blossom. It seemed incongruous, almost impossible, that war, with its horrors and devastation, should visit this lovely land. But so it was to be—and at no very distant date.

At Lagery the 110th Brigade rested in peace and comfort for a week. It was a fine training ground and full use was made of it, training in musketry being much practised, as there were excellent rifle ranges already existing. The men were very comfortable, either in hut camps, which were extraordinarily good and well run, lit by electric light and with plenty of water, or in good clean billets in the villages. The French arrangements in the back areas appeared to be particularly good and efficient, being well and carefully organised under good officers, who by reason of wounds or ill health

were unable to serve at the front. Although not of long duration, this pleasant period worked wonders with the men, who presented a very different appearance to what they did on arrival, war-worn and weary from the Ypres fighting.

On the 13th, the Brigade marched to Pévy in readiness to go into the line, where the 21st Division were to relieve the 74th French Division in the left sector (Chalons le Vergeur) of the 38th French Corps. The 110th Brigade were to relieve the 230th French Infantry Regt. (Le régiment de Savoie) in the centre of the Divisional front on the night 14th/15th of May. The 62nd Brigade took over the left sector with their left on the Aisne, and the 64th Brigade the right sector, joining up with the 45th French Division just North of Loivre.

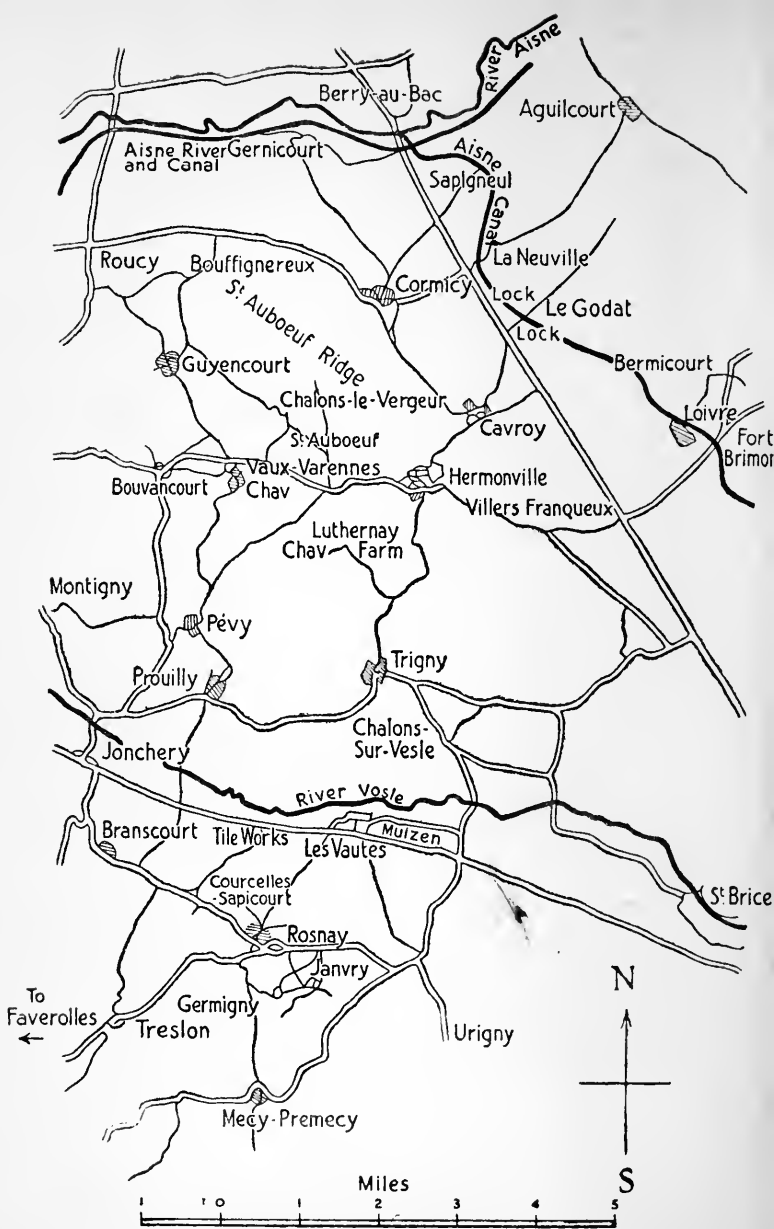
The Brigadier, starting early on the 13th, went forward to the 230th Regt. H.Q. to reconnoitre the line, get all the information he could from the French colonel commanding the sector and make arrangements for the relief. The colonel proved to be a charming personality—a true type of the versatile French

Army. The staff, too, were typical of the smart regiment to which they belonged. Nothing was too much trouble and everything that could be done to help was done in a spirit of good will and good comradeship which was most engaging. A sumptuous lunch, in a style and on a scale which the British Army could never hope to compete with, was provided at Headquarters, after which the line was visited and the salient points of the defence scheme were pointed out on the ground and a general view of the trenches obtained. The front was so extensive that it was hopeless to attempt to get more than a cursory view of the line in one day.

For the time being the 21st Division was under the tactical orders of the 38th French Corps, and it was not until the 16th that the IX British Corps, under Lieut-General Hamilton Gordon, took over the Corps sector. The IX Corps consisted of the 8th, 21st, 25th and 50th Divisions and was subsequently reinforced by the 19th Division. The 21st Division was in the line on the right from Brimont to the Aisne. The 8th and 50th Divisions were

North of the Aisne, holding the sector between that river and the lower slopes of the Chemin des Dames, where they joined up again with the French. The 8th Division were on the right, with their right resting on the river: the 50th Division on the left, joining up with the French. The 25th Division were in Corps reserve. It was at once apparent that the front held in this manner was very extended for the number of troops allotted for its defence. The Divisional front extended for a distance of 7,500 yards. The 110th Brigade had a front of 2,500 yards to be held by three weak battalions, who had only been filled up recently by a large proportion of young and untrained men, and there had been little time to rectify this before going into the line. The position on the divisional front was a bad one; the Aisne Canal ran along the whole length of it and divided it into two portions, the area East of the Canal and that West of it.

On the flanks the forward line ran close to the Canal, but in the centre it made a deep loop away from it, the greatest distance being



THE GERMAN OFFENSIVE IN CHAMPAGNE (May 27, 1918).

about 1,000 yards. The Canal itself was broad and constituted a formidable obstacle which was enhanced by a belt of marsh about 150 yards broad, lying immediately to the East of it. The area East of the Canal formed in this way an Outpost Zone for the remainder of the area West of it, but it was entirely dominated by the Boche positions—Hill 108, Mt. Sapin and Sapin gneul, and above all Mt. Brimont.

The area to the West of the Canal was defended by a double belt of strong points connected by a continuous trench line. This position lay for the most part along a low ridge overlooking the Canal and formed a strong defensive line with a good obstacle in its immediate front, but there were insufficient numbers allotted to it to admit of its being properly manned together with the forward zone East of the Canal.

The whole of the Divisional sector, including the lofty St. Aubœuf ridge in rear of it, was under observation from the enemy positions. This was to some extent neutralised by the excellent road camouflage erected by the

French and the thick woods which covered the slopes of St. Aubœuf. To judge from the enemy's initial artillery bombardment, the existence of Brigade H.Q., though on the forward slopes of the St. Aubœuf ridge, was never suspected. The enemy's forward areas and portions of his main roads were under observation from both the crest of St. Aubœuf ridge and from the rising ground West of the Canal.

On the 14th, the units of the Brigade left their camps and billets at 3 a.m. and marched to day halting places, so as to arrive by 6.30 a.m. before it was light. This was done in order to keep the troops under cover from enemy observation during the day and to get them near enough to the front to be able to relieve without undue fatigue. The 6th Leicesters were to take over the right subsector and the 7th Leicesters the left, while the 8th Battalion remained in reserve at Chalons le Vergeur. Brigade H.Q. were very pleasantly situated in a wood at the foot of the St. Aubœuf ridge, just below the Tour de Rougemont — an old, dilapidated masonry

watch-tower standing on the crest of the ridge, which proved a prominent landmark for miles round. The whole Headquarters were accommodated in a dug-out, tunnelled into a bank on the hillside and, being in the middle of the wood, it was beautifully screened from any aerial observation. The wood itself was delightful, full of lilies of the valley and spring wild flowers, and its shade was very welcome in the boiling heat which prevailed at this time.

The Brigadier, not relishing the idea of living in the dug-out, had a small wooden hut built for himself outside, which improved matters considerably. Altogether these Headquarters were something entirely new, and much more comfortable than was usually the case in the line. The relief was successfully carried out that night between 10 and midnight, and after breakfast the French colonel departed with many expressions of goodwill and friendship. The weather was lovely, almost too hot. The Headquarters were rather far back and as it was impossible to ride further than the Cormicy road it meant a

considerable amount of walking in visiting the line, especially the forward area, and this in the abnormal heat made the distances seem greater than they really were.

The general atmosphere of the front was absolutely peaceful prior to May 27. Shells were few and far between, and trench mortaring was slight and practically confined to a small area, while hardly any registration of any calibre of gun took place. From the 22nd onwards, however, enemy movement behind the line was seen by observers to have greatly increased. A large amount of traffic was noticed, chiefly converging on the sector astride the Aisne, and one morning about dawn numerous teams of horses, undoubtedly artillery teams, were seen withdrawing from a suspected battery area. On the 25th a raid on the enemy's line was attempted by two parties of the 7th Leicesters, but the front line was found empty and the second line, to which they penetrated, was found to be so strongly wired that it was impossible to approach it. The raid accomplished nothing and failed to acquire an identification which was much

required. As soon as the line was taken over, very active patrolling was instituted, but directly the enemy found our attitude was becoming aggressive he ceased his own patrolling activity altogether, evidently with the idea of avoiding all chance of losses in prisoners who might give valuable information. It was only the excessive movements in back areas, together with the laying of cables and air lines which was observed on the 26th, and their determination to avoid giving away identification, that gave any indication whatever of an offensive—and these indications were not very conclusive.

The 8th Leicesters relieved the 6th Leicesters in the right subsector on the night of the 20th/21st and the 7th Leicesters should have been relieved by the 6th Battalion on the night of the 27th/28th. This relief was cancelled, however, as on the 26th information was received that prisoners taken by the IX French Corps had stated that an attack would take place on the morning of the 27th, and in consequence of this the following precautions were taken. One company of the 6th Leices-

ters reinforced the 7th Battalion in the line as a support, and the Battalion H.Q., which was rather far forward on route 44, was brought back to the Tenaille de Guise, East of Cormicy. The nucleus parties of the 7th and 8th Battalion, who were at the transport lines, were organised into a company and ordered to a position of readiness East of the Cavroy-Cormicy Road, as a reinforcement for the 8th Battalion. The indications were so slight and everything was so calm that the chance of an attack seemed very small to the Brigadier's mind, but the information turned out to be perfectly correct. No doubts could possibly be entertained after the beginning of the opening bombardment at 1 a.m. on the 27th that it was the prelude to a very heavy attack. This bombardment was extremely intense with all calibres, shrapnel, high explosive, and gas being all used. No buried routes for the telephone cables were in existence, with the consequence that, after the commencement of the bombardment, all telephonic communication forward of Brigade H.Q. ceased within a few minutes and could never be restored—a very serious draw-

back at such a moment. Everything was wrapped in fog until after 8 a.m. and it was quite impossible to see anything from either the forward O.P.'s or from those in the St. Aubœuf ridge. The only information that could be obtained was by message from the forward battalion which, however, arrived very regularly. Up to 7.15 a.m., these merely reported the fact of heavy shelling and complete invisibility. At 7.15 a.m. a message from the 7th Leicesters reported that the enemy had captured La Neuville, were pushing South-West and had already reached the West bank of the Canal. A further message, timed 7.20 a.m., reported enemy patrols creeping from the Canal towards the main line of resistance West of the Canal. This information was very puzzling to the Brigadier as no big infantry attack had been reported East of the Canal, and it was considered that the strength in that area was sufficient to hold up any attack for some considerable period. It was evident from the initial stages that something extraordinary had occurred, and that from some cause or other the weight of the attack was

coming from the North, and this indeed proved to be the case. The forward area East of the Canal, although attacked in front, was also turned and attacked round its left flank, with the result that the whole of the garrison was surrounded and cut off before they had a chance to retire across the Canal. This was a very serious loss, as practically a third of the Brigade strength thus disappeared, and the proportion of numbers to length of front was already very small. Owing to the virtual annihilation of the companies East of the Canal, it is practically impossible to say the exact time when the enemy launched his infantry attack, but from various indications it is presumed that it started between 3 and 4 a.m.

The explanation of what occurred North of the Aisne was disclosed later. Apparently three or four hours after the opening of the bombardment, the enemy attacked in force the French Divisions holding the Chemin des Dames. Heavily attacked and exposed on the ridge to the intense bombardment, these Divisions were driven off the high ground and were unable to prevent the enemy reaching the

Aisne and seizing the bridges over it. The 50th Division was by this move practically cut off fighting to the last, ceasing to exist except for a few isolated fragments who managed to make their way South to the Aisne. The same thing happened, though in a less degree, to the 8th Division, which however had more time to adapt itself to the new situation; but the result was that it became badly split up and suffered very heavy casualties, those portions of it which crossed the Aisne being too disorganised to be of much further use as a fighting formation. By reason of these developments, the left flank of the 21st Division became uncovered and remained so for the rest of the operation. The forward companies East of the Canal were able to hold their ground against the frontal attack, but their left flank was turned before they had time to realise what had occurred, and they became enveloped by penetration along the line of the Canal. The whole of the troops in this forward area were cut off and every Brigade lost a third of its fighting strength, which it could ill afford. The enemy pressed the advantage

which he thus obtained during the remaining days of the withdrawal, but was unable to break the line or the cohesion with the 45th French Division. He was continually turning the left flank, which remained "en l'air" and thus forcing the Division to pivot on the right flank by continually throwing back the left, until troops could be brought up to fill the gap. The 25th Division, directly it was known that a break through had occurred and that the enemy were on the Aisne, were brought up to protect this flank, but, although becoming heavily engaged, their numbers were insufficient to stem the tide.

From 7.30 a.m. onwards the 21st Division, fighting doggedly, was gradually pressed back by weight of numbers and by the fact that its left flank was being continually turned. The reserve battalions of all three Brigades were by degrees used up as reinforcements and to restore the situation by counter-attack. Finally, as a last reinforcement, the Pioneer Battalion, and all three Field Companies R.E. were thrown into the fight. The struggle was a very bitter one ; desperate fights occurred

for the strong points of the line ; the Tenaille de Guise for one was taken and retaken twice before being actually overcome. Garrisons of the works immediately to the West of the Canal continued to fight although surrounded, when the enemy was attacking the Cormicy-Cavroy road well in the rear. Heavily attacked, outnumbered and outflanked, the Division managed to keep its line and its fighting formation intact.

By 6 p.m. the Division had been driven back as far as the line of the Cormicy-Cavroy Road, the 62nd Brigade holding Cormicy village and throwing a flank back in the direction of the Bois de Val, with a Brigade of the 25th Division continuing the line further to the West. The 64th Brigade was holding the outskirts of Cavroy in touch with the 45th French Division on their right, in the direction of Villers Franqueux. Such was the situation when orders were received to withdraw during the night, as soon as it was dark, in a South-Westerly direction, the idea being to occupy a new front, pivoting on Hermonville, the line then running by the

high ground of St. Aubœuf in the direction of Bouvancourt. The 64th Brigade, with their right on Hermonville, which was to be occupied by a battalion of the 45th French Division, were to swing back to the high ground at St. Aubœuf. The 7th Brigade, 25th Division, was to continue the line to the Chalons le Vergeur road, West of St. Aubœuf. The 110th Brigade to hold from there along the ridge towards Bouvancourt, where junction with the 8th Division was to be formed. The 62nd Brigade was to withdraw and form the Divisional Reserve.

The withdrawal was a matter of some difficulty, the troops were for the most part in close contact with the enemy, and some difficulty was experienced in getting orders to the extreme left of the Brigade (the 7th Leicesters) as they were situated in the wood near La Sablière, where they had been engaged with the enemy for some little time before the orders reached them, and were somewhat disorganised in consequence. All this important work of getting orders delivered was carried out by "runners," and no one knows

what wonderful skill and initiative they showed in carrying out their duties. Their work was, naturally, carried out in circumstances where no one saw their difficulties or their methods in overcoming them; they could only be judged by results. It required a man with a stout heart and iron nerve to carry a message successfully in pitch darkness through a thick wood, of which his knowledge was small and which was full of enemy patrols. Their duty was not a spectacular one; they were generally alone and there was every facility for shirking if they had felt so inclined, but such a thing was rare, if not entirely unknown. Many wonderful instances of the devotion and bravery of these men in circumstances which might appal the bravest are known and vouched for, but no greater trial could be found than those endured by these men throughout that night in getting urgent and essential orders to their battalions. All honour to them, as very few got through unscratched.

Orders for the withdrawal having been issued and the fact of their delivery having

been ascertained, Brigade H.Q. withdrew to the crest of the St. Aubœuf ridge and there awaited the arrival of the Brigade. At this place caves existed cut out of the rock; these were known as the Champignonnières and were apparently devoted to the cultivation of mushrooms in happier times. While waiting, the Brigadier got in touch with Divisional Headquarters on the telephone, but the only information he got before the telephone line was cut was that the enemy were in possession of Chalons le Vergeur, where Divisional Headquarters had been but a short time before. This news was not very encouraging, as Chalons was not very far from the road along which the Brigade had to go to reach its new position and it had not yet even disentangled itself from the woods. Eventually the battalions arrived—or what was left of them, as the two forward companies of the 7th and 8th Battalions and one company of the 6th Battalion, which had been sent as a reinforcement to the 7th Battalion early in the day, had totally disappeared. The remainder were considerably disorganised, and stragglers and

small parties who had lost themselves in the woods continued to make their appearance for some time afterwards. The Brigade assembled at the junction of the Bouvancourt and Chalons le Vergeur roads at about 11.30 p.m. where the three battalions were hastily organised into one battalion, placed under command of Colonel Chance of the 6th Battalion, and guided to their positions. Brigade H.Q. were established at Vaux Varennes. By 1.30 a.m. however it was learnt from information derived from patrols that there were no forward elements of either the 8th Division or the 7th Brigade (25th Division) on the left or right, and Bouvancourt itself was found to be occupied by the Boche. Further, from reports brought in by despatch riders, and from a company of the 2nd Lincolns who had passed through on their way to rejoin their Brigade in the direction of Pévy, it was evident that the enemy were pushing patrols Westwards from Bouvancourt and had already cut the road South of Vaux Varennes, thus completely isolating the Brigade from Divisional Headquarters at Prouilly, so that no information

about the situation was obtainable. In these circumstances the Brigadier decided to withdraw the Brigade as quickly as possible and to endeavour, under cover of darkness, to obtain touch with the 64th Brigade, whose Headquarters were known to be at Luthernay Farm. Orders to this effect were sent out at once and the Brigade formed up on the cross-country track running East from Vaux Varennes towards Luthernay Farm, the only route which appeared available. The withdrawal began about 3.30 a.m., covered by one company of the 6th Leicesters, under Captain Scholes, and was carried out without incident, except for low flying enemy planes about dawn. Luthernay Farm was reached shortly after dawn, and a hasty conference with the 64th Brigade disclosed the fact that their left flank was uncovered. Their right, however, was in touch with the French at Hermonville. It was decided between the two Brigadiers that the 110th Brigade should take up a position on the left flank, holding the high ground at St. Aubœuf and forming a defensive flank on the ridge just West of the Chalons le

Vergeur-Pévy road. This was accordingly done and the Brigade, which had once more resumed its battalion formation, was got into position, the 6th Leicesters on the St. Aubœuf ridge and the 7th and 8th Battalions forming the defensive flank. Brigade H.Q. were established in a bank about half a mile further South, on the Pévy road.

Shortly after the troops gained their positions orders were received from the Division for the 64th and 62nd Brigades to take up a line on the Hermonville-Montigny ridge, and for the 110th Brigade to withdraw into Divisional Reserve, at Pévy. Orders to this effect were sent out at once, but owing to the despatch rider being wounded the 6th Leicesters never received theirs and became detached for the remainder of the day with the 64th Brigade.

About this time it became apparent that the enemy was advancing so rapidly, and the situation changing in consequence so often, that it was impossible for the Division to keep pace with it and issue and deliver orders in time for them to be acted upon.

It therefore devolved upon Brigadiers to make decisions and order movements on their own initiative, endeavouring as far as possible to carry out the general scheme without orders and with no information—a by no means easy task, as the point of view of a Brigadier is necessarily somewhat limited. This was especially the case during this day's operations (28th), when the enemy moved so fast round the left flank that it became merely a question of delaying his advance as long as was compatible with withdrawing the troops before they were actually surrounded and cut off. Altogether it can be imagined that it proved a somewhat hectic day for the Brigadiers in the front line.

Having issued the orders for the withdrawal to Pévy, the 110th Brigade H.Q., about 6 a.m., proceeded down the road towards that village, with the object of getting arrangements made beforehand for the advent of the troops. As they approached the village, however, the heights above it were suddenly occupied by the enemy who, on catching sight of those in the road, immediately opened a heavy fire with machine

guns. It was a complete surprise as nothing was further from the Brigadier's thoughts at that moment than to find the enemy there. There was no time to lose, so he ordered the H.Q. to get off the road and make for the Prouilly ridge on the opposite side of the valley. This move entailed crossing a swamp in the centre of the valley and a stiff climb up to the ridge on the opposite side, followed the whole way by heavy but fortunately inaccurate fire, from the Boche machine guns on the hill. No one was hit and the movement was carried out without mishap; but it was not pleasant, especially for those men with bicycles, who had to carry them across the marsh and haul them on the opposite side. The Headquarters mess waiter, Meadows, was in charge of the few utensils that were being used and the rations, all of which were in a sack. This he insisted on carrying; nothing would induce him to leave it, and he finally bore it in triumph to safety on the top of the ridge—a fine feat of doggedness and muscle on a hot day.

On arrival the crest of the ridge was found

to be held by some disorganised elements of the 8th and 25th Divisions. On the extreme left flank, facing West and South-West, over the valley of the Vesle, were the 14th Northumberland Fusiliers (Pioneers) together with the 12th/13th N.F.'s of the 62nd Brigade. On the arrival of the 110th Brigade H.Q. the line was reorganised and placed in position. Touch was gained on the right with the two battalions of French troops and some more troops of the 25th Division. Connection for the time being had of course been lost with the troops of the Brigade who, when this happened, had been in process of withdrawing to Pévy. They however, for the most part, made their way across the head of the valley, and eventually reorganised on the crest of the ridge; Captain Scholes' company of the 6th Leicesters, who had acted as rearguard from Vaux Varennes, also falling back on it during the morning. The enemy made no attempt to attack this position throughout the morning, although he occasionally shelled it fairly heavily. But masses of his troops could be seen defiling towards the valley of the Vesle in the direction of

Jonchery, which shortly afterwards burst into flames. The 64th Brigade had also been forced back during the morning and was now occupying the remainder of the Trigny-Prouilly ridge, just North of Trigny. At about 3 p.m. the line North of Trigny was heavily shelled and attacked and appeared to give way and withdraw some distance. A very heavy attack preceded by artillery and machine-gun fire developed along the whole front at about 3.30 p.m. and the left of the line, being much exposed from the valley, was driven back. Both flanks being now uncovered, it was decided to withdraw to the line of the Vesle in accordance with instructions issued from the Division earlier in the day. Orders were accordingly sent to carry this movement out, but it was very difficult to get them to all the scattered and intermingled units on the hill, and portions of the ridge remained held by the French and some of our own men till nightfall, when they were able to retire. The withdrawal to the line of the river Vesle was carried out without hindrance. The battalion were able to reorganise to some extent and took up a position

from the Tile Works West of Muizon to Muizon itself. The 62nd Brigade continued the line Westwards towards Jonchery. By 8 p.m. the troops were in position, and during the night touch was gained at Muizon with the 64th Brigade, the 6th Leicesters rejoining the next morning. Brigade Headquarters of both 62nd and 110th Brigades were established at the Chateau in Rosnay from which, as it was situated on a hill, an excellent view of the surrounding country could be obtained, although the actual line of the river was screened by the thick woods.

The night of the 28th/29th and the early morning of the 29th passed fairly quietly, except that it became increasingly evident that the enemy intended pushing his attack mainly from the direction of Jonchery in a South-Westerly direction, still pursuing his tactics of turning the left flank. It was in consequence of this tendency that, as a precautionary measure in the first instance, an observation post was established on the early morning of the 29th on Hill 202, a small knoll standing considerably above the surrounding

country about one mile West of Rosnay. Some French troops by this time had been brought up on the left flank and some of these were holding a line West of the Treslon-Sapiecourt road, joining up with the 62nd Brigade troops holding the line of the Vesle. The main enemy movement however was more in a South-Westerly direction, aiming at enveloping the Treslon-Faverolles-Savigny flank.

Later in the morning as the situation developed all available troops and stragglers were sent up to a position of readiness near Hill 202. This force was placed under the orders of Lieut.-Colonel Chance, of the 6th Leicesters, who at once organised a defensive line in the vicinity of the hill and sent a detachment to support the French on the Treslon-Sapiecourt line. This line was heavily attacked during the morning from the direction of Branscourt and was gradually forced back. Reports from the Vesle front indicated that all was quiet on that side, so the 1st Lincolns and, later, the 12th/13th Northumberland Fusiliers of the 62nd Brigade, were withdrawn

and sent to strengthen the Hill 202-Sapiecourt front during the afternoon.

And so the fight ebbed and flowed during the morning and early afternoon, the enemy attacks on the Treslon-Sapiecourt front becoming stronger and stronger as the day wore on. Information was obtained also of heavy enemy attacks in the direction of Savigny along the line of the valley of the Ardre. But there were evidences of more French troops arriving who were directed towards this point, and rumour also had it that the 19th British Division was on its way, advancing up the valley of the Ardre. The immediate left flank of the Brigade (the Treslon-Sapiecourt line) and Hill 202 were a source of endless anxiety throughout the day as, if that gave way, the situation of the troops holding the line of the Vesle would be seriously jeopardised.

During the morning, after a visit from an enemy aeroplane flying very low, which no doubt reported that the Chateau was being used as a Headquarters, Rosnay was very heavily shelled, especially in the vicinity of the Chateau. The Headquarters of all three

Brigades had therefore to depart somewhat hurriedly and established themselves on the edge of the woods on the high ground South of Rosnay, where they remained until late in the afternoon.

At 6.45 p.m. Lieut-Colonel Sawyer, 7th Leicesters, reported the situation on the Vesle front still fairly quiet, but that his left flank was seriously menaced by large numbers of the enemy threatening an attack near his junction with the 12th/13th Northumberland Fusiliers, who were prolonging the line with the French and some elements of the 25th Division down to Sapiecourt. This was very soon developed into a very serious attack all along the line. By 7.30 p.m. the salient where the two forces joined was driven in and Colonel Sawyer withdrew his force to a line West of and parallel to the Les Vautes-Rosnay road. At the same time Sapiecourt was taken and shortly afterwards Courcelles as well, and the enemy finally crossed the Treslon-Sapiecourt road and secured a footing on the slopes of Hill 202. This position prior to the attack had been very heavily shelled throughout the afternoon,

causing heavy casualties, as there was little cover, and, much to every one's grief, Lieut.-Colonel Chance was killed. He was a great loss and his death added considerably to the anxieties of the Brigadier as he had been the life and soul of the defence on this important flank during the whole day. Captain Tooth, the adjutant of the 6th Battalion, took over the command and carried on the action with great ability for the remainder of the operation, finally bringing the troops on that flank out of action.

Shortly afterwards it was reported that Treslon had been captured, but as more and more French reinforcements appeared about this time advancing in that direction it was hoped that the situation might improve. At 8 p.m. the position was sufficiently serious, however; French troops and about 200 men of the 110th Brigade were holding a line West of Rosnay Farm, roughly along the line of the Treslon Road; other mixed elements continued the line West of Rosnay to the Courcelles Road; thence the remainder of the 7th Battalion, estimated at about 100 strong,

continued the line along the East side of the Les Vautes-Rosnay road to Muizon, where they joined up with the 64th Brigade.

The troops were dead beat and by this time considerably disorganised and mixed up after the three days' fighting in circumstances which never afforded a minute's breathing space in which to reorganise. But disorganised as they were, the units kept their cohesion in a wonderful way; naturally in the confusion arising from withdrawing at night from St. Aubœuf woods and the withdrawal the following morning from Luthernay farm, there were a great many stragglers—men who had lost their way and were endeavouring to find their units. These were collected and organised from time to time in formations composed of men of all three battalions and possibly of other units as well, who were then sent into the fight again, where they fought well and bravely, in spite of the difficulties under which they laboured. In the evening all three Brigade Headquarters withdrew to the village of Mery Premicy, in accordance with instructions from the Division, and orders were received about

9 p.m. that the 15th French Division were taking over the line and that units of the 21st Division were to withdraw wherever their front was covered by troops of that Division.

Instructions to this effect were sent out. As the troops were scattered and intermixed, it was a matter of some difficulty, but it was eventually managed by each Brigade sending a mounted staff officer to explain personally to commanding officers of units and detachments what was required, and where the units were to rendezvous on retirement. Between 1 and 2 p.m. on May 30 the scattered units West of Rosnay under Captain Tooth and those North of Rosnay under Colonel Sawyer were withdrawn and retired to Mery Premicy where the Brigade H.Q. were established and, after a short halt in which battalions were reorganised and sorted out, the Brigade marched to Pourcy. Here a halt of three hours was made, during which the men got some hot food and a rest which they badly needed. The same morning about 11 a.m. the march was resumed, the Marne was crossed at Damery and the Division finally halted for the night in

the Forêt D'Épernay, half way between Vauciennes and St. Martin D'Ablois. The next day the 110th Brigade marched to Étrechy and went into billets, where at last a real rest was obtained. The following day (1st June), the Division organised a Composite Brigade, under General Gater, composed of a battalion made up from each Brigade. The 110th battalion, 350 strong, was commanded by Lieut.-Colonel Irwin, 8th Leicesters. This Composite Brigade was then sent forward on June 2 to take up a line along the Marne between Dormans and Troissy, with Brigade H.Q. at Comblizy, where it remained until relieved later in the month.

The German offensive ended on the Marne at Château Thierry and along the line of the river as far East as Chatillon, and thus succeeded in producing a deep salient in the angle between Soissons, Château Thierry and Rheims—a very small gain when compared with the sacrifices it entailed; a gain, too, which in the end when the time for counter-attack arrived proved itself to be a snare and a delusion. The 21st Division took no further part in the

operations except for the rôle played on the Marne by the Composite Brigade under the tactical orders of the French. What was left of the latter marched by easy stages to an area near Sézanne whence it was railed to the Oisemont area, rejoining the Division about June 21, when Brigades were reorganised and new drafts were forthcoming to amalgamate with the battalions.

The Division subsequently moved to the Gamache area, near Dieppe, a delightful locality where good training ground was available. It was thought that a certain time, perhaps six weeks, would now be given to the Division to recuperate and train its newly constituted units; and considering what the Division had been through this would have been scarcely too long to restore it to its former state of efficiency. The Gamache area was one of the most pleasant of the back areas. The country was charming, especially so at this time of the year; the villages were good and clean, and provided comfortable billets for the men; moreover the training area was conveniently situated and possessed the

requisite natural features for carrying out practical exercises. The sea coast between Dieppe and Eu was within reach and rendered sea bathing possible—a thing the men much enjoyed and which did them a lot of good in many ways.

The Brigadier went off on leave to England at the end of June and confidently expected to find the Division where he had left it on his return. Shortly after arrival in England he received a wire telling him to rejoin on the 7th July, and on getting back he found that the Division had moved to Beauquesne and had joined the 5th Corps preparatory to going into the line East of Acheux. And so ended any idea of any rest or training.

From the operations just described little can be gained for any instructional purpose. The fighting while it lasted was so intense and the pace was so severe that everything became confused and disorganised to such an extent that nothing could be extracted from such a hurly-burly to serve as a guide for future operations of a like kind. It was a time when quick decisions were necessary and rapid

movement essential, when all that could be done was to keep the line intact and unbroken and carry out the scheme of delaying the advance as long as possible and so enable reinforcements to arrive before it was too late. Of the finer elements of tactics there were none. It was simply hammer and tongs all the time, where every man and every gun was employed with the one idea of stemming the tide to the best of their ability in the circumstances in which they happened to find themselves at any moment.

The Field Artillery, however, after the first day's operations, when they fought their guns to the last moment to check the attack and had some difficulty in getting away in consequence, manœuvred with considerable success and tactical skill in the open fighting which occurred later. Finding it difficult, if not impossible, to define accurately the position of their own infantry, and noting that the chief danger lay in the exposed left flank, they concentrated all their efforts on covering that flank by their fire. They were able to get excellent positions and their targets were such

as a gunner dreams of but seldom sees—and their efforts were successful, as, although gravely exposed after the first twenty-four hours, that flank was never driven in except by an attack in force. This action assisted the infantry to a far greater extent than support against frontal attacks would have done, where it would have been difficult to locate targets with any accuracy.

The most outstanding feature was the choice of the defensive position from the Aisne Southwards towards Rheims. Here was exemplified that fetish for retaining ground wherever won, regardless of whether it was the best position tactically or not. The position held was tactically unsound: it was dominated by the enemy positions and it had a very serious obstacle in rear. The ground East of the Canal could have no sentimental value, being composed of marsh and a medley of shell holes and trenches of no use to any one. The only reason that could be adduced for retaining it was that it had been won and therefore must be held at all costs. In war such reasons are folly, and worse than folly—they are almost

criminal. In this particular case the advantages gained if this ground had been given up would have been immense. A strong line existed to the West of and commanding the Canal and this would have possessed the obstacle of the Canal and marsh in front of it, well within range—an ideal combination. An outpost zone, holding the line of the Canal and the area between that and Route 44, could have been established and this would have made the position an almost ideal one; for an advance entailing the crossing of the Canal and the marsh, with the ground dominated as it was from both forward and back positions, would have proved a very costly operation, if not entirely impossible. Representations were made for carrying out this change, at any rate in part, but nothing was done owing to the enemy's advance taking place before a change could be made. This was by no means the only instance of ground being occupied regardless of the tactical requirements, and merely for the sentimental idea that ground once won should never be given up. Sentiment has no place in war and should never be given precedence

over tactical principles the neglect of which leads to defeat and disaster.

Many people seemed to think that Trench Warfare differed from Open Warfare, and that the former required a special form of tactics. In reality, however, the principles laid down in Field Service Regulations apply just as much to one as to the other. In actual practice the principles of defence laid down in that excellent book apply equally to Trench Warfare, and can be, and should always be, carried out *in extenso* when such a phase become necessary during operations.

On July 3 the Division left the Gamache area and moved by rail to the vicinity of Beauquesne, billeting in the villages in that area. There they remained until the 12th, employing the time in training of all kinds, especially musketry, as good ranges existed for that purpose. The Division now formed part of the 5th Corps, under Lieut.-General Cameron Shute, the other Divisions in the Corps being at this time the 63rd (Naval) Division and the 35th (Welsh) Division. Later on the 17th Division replaced the 63rd, which then

became part of the 4th Corps who were in position North of the 5th Corps. The Corps sector comprised that part of the line running from a point just North of Albert to Beaumont Hamel, the northern part of the line being very familiar ground to the Brigadier.

On the 13th the Brigade moved forward to Acheux, taking over the line from a Brigade of the 63rd Division on the 14th; Brigade H.Q. were located in a sunken road on the Western outskirts of the village of Englebelmer. The Brigade sector ran approximately from the Northern corner of Aveluy Wood to the high ground immediately West of the village of Hamel, the Northern half of the Divisional front (up to Beaumont Hamel) being occupied by another Brigade.

This sector ran along the Ancre valley, which is here a deep ravine, with the heights of Thiepval on one side and on the other the lower elevations of the high ridge which runs from just North of Albert to Auchonvillers. The banks of the Ancre are in this part high and precipitous, dropping sharply from the heights to the river below. In a

shallower depression at the point where the Ancre turns sharply Eastwards below the Thiepval heights, situated on the West bank is, or rather was, the village of Hamel—once a prettily situated village, nestling in a fold of the slopes with vistas of the Ancre valley stretching South and East in a long perspective of wooded banks, now a blackened heap of ruins after three years in the front line. The Ancre valley itself was unoccupied as it was commanded and overlooked from both sides: it was the happy hunting ground of night patrols and there was many a lively skirmish in its depths before we finally claimed it for our own. The village was always a doubtful spot, and it was never finally established whether it was actually occupied by the Boche or not. It was certainly occupied by them with small posts after dark as an outpost to their trench system, which here was astride the river and ran up to the ravine leading to Beaumont Hamel. These small outlying posts were a magnet for many night patrols and efforts were continually made to try and capture them, but they were very wary

birds and never occupied the same place two nights running. There was many a fight between the patrols and these posts on this account, but we never succeeded in rounding up and capturing one of them.

From the 14th onwards the Brigade continued to occupy this sector and took part once again in the wearisome process known as "holding the line". It was by no means a pleasant part, either. The trenches were not particularly good or well built—they never were in this part of the line where the Ancre mud is so fickle that what may be a trench one day is a quagmire the next. There was a lot of work to be done; support and reserve lines had to be reorganised and practically rebuilt, communications improved, and schemes for the support of existing trench lines and for counter-attack under all circumstances had to be thought out and put into shape. It was thought when the line was first taken over that an attack was imminent on this part of the front, and later, when this had passed after the success which occurred further South in the middle of July, came the opposite swing

of the pendulum, when the enemy was expected to withdraw. That was a period of incessant activity and watchfulness, commencing at the beginning of the month of August and lasting till the beginning of the advance on the 21st of that month. During the whole period the enemy was particularly active with his artillery, the area being constantly subjected to bursts of artillery fire of all calibres. Gas he made a speciality of more particularly at night, and in spite of every precaution it was difficult to evade the effects of the mustard concentrations which he frequently put over. This particular form of gas is the hardest to combat as owing to its peculiar properties it sticks to and impregnates anything with which it comes in contact. Any one who passed through an area in which this gas had been let loose had immediately to change his outer garments, otherwise it was impossible for him to avoid being affected himself and affecting any one else in the vicinity from his own clothing. It was a constant source of trouble and anxiety as it was not always easy to tell where a gassed area had been after a certain time had elapsed,

and casualties were sometimes considerable from this cause. One night, when the reserve line at Englebelmer was heavily gassed the company holding the trenches concerned was immediately moved from the vicinity, according to orders. Although not affected that night, the following morning when the sun came out the whole company became casualties, partially from their own clothing and partially because a gentle breeze blowing in the right direction wafted the gas, drawn out of the ground by the heat of the morning sun, directly across them. No precaution or care could fight against such a devilish combination but everything was done that could be thought of to combat the evil.

Thus this month of waiting drew towards its close. It was the final experience of trench warfare, which as far as the Brigadier's career was concerned, began and ended in very much the same spot.

Chapter 7 : *The Counter-Offensive—August—November, 1918*

FROM August 20 onwards, the final offensive on our part may be said to have started. Owing to the successful operations near Villers Bretonneux by the Australian Corps of the 4th Army, the position of the enemy on the right bank of the Ancre, North of Albert, was getting more and more precarious and resulted eventually in his gradual withdrawal from South to North. The whole of Aveluy Wood was clear of the enemy by the 5th. Hamel was evacuated about the 16th, and by the 17th the 21st Division outpost line had pushed forward to the line of the Ancre East of Hamel, thence immediately West of Beaucourt to the high ground North of it.

From now onwards, an enemy withdrawal on a large scale was anticipated, and it was

therefore of paramount importance to keep in close touch with him and to discover the moment such a retirement would commence. Ceaseless patrolling was ordered and arrangements made to follow up instantly any such move on his part. This entailed very hard work for the front line troops, as this patrolling work, carried out by strong fighting patrols of the strength of one platoon, was of a trying and arduous nature. At various times during this period patrols forced their way, with great difficulty and admirable skill, across the Ancre and penetrated into the enemy lines, procuring valuable information and having many exciting experiences and a considerable amount of fighting in doing so. One patrol, venturing too far one misty morning, was ambushed and cut off, and a spirited and running fight ensued, from which only one of the patrol managed to escape. Although at considerable cost, valuable information was gained by this encounter. These patrols were boldly and skilfully handled, and enabled the higher command to watch the enemy as a cat does a mouse: no move that he made could go undetected. They were

however carried out at the expense of a certain number of casualties at a time when the Brigade was by no means fresh, having been in the line for a considerable time.

It was decided that a move forward should be made on August 21, the scheme of attack being that the 62nd Brigade should capture Beaucourt and advance along the high ground North of the Ancre towards Miraumont in conjunction with a similar advance carried out by the 42nd Division further North. Beaucourt having been captured, the 110th Brigade was to cross the Ancre and endeavour to establish itself on the high ground South-East of the river in conjunction with a similar advance by the 17th Division further South. Six companies, four from the 6th and two from the 7th Leicesters, were ordered to carry out this operation.

In accordance with this scheme, on the night of the 20th/21st, the 114th Brigade relieved the 110th Brigade, who in their turn relieved the 62nd Brigade further North. After this reorganisation the 7th Leicesters under the command of Lieut.-Colonel Sawyer, D.S.O.,

became the front line battalion, with the 6th Leicesters under the command of Lieut.-Colonel Martyn in support and the 1st Wilts under the command of Lieut.-Colonel Ward, D.S.O., in reserve; Brigade Headquarters moved from Englebelmer to the vicinity of Auchonvillers.

The next morning (21st) the 62nd Brigade attacked and captured Beaucourt, advancing beyond it towards Miraumont. The operation, however, of crossing the Ancre and making good the high ground South-East of it was found impracticable. The marshes were not fordable and no crossings existed; moreover the Eastern edge was strongly held by the enemy. It had been decided beforehand that if strong opposition was encountered the operation was not to be pressed. On the following night (21st/22nd), two footbridges were very skilfully constructed by the Royal Engineers, and by means of these two companies of the 7th Leicesters crossed, and after hard fighting established and maintained themselves on the slopes above the river. This brilliant little action was the first step towards gaining com-

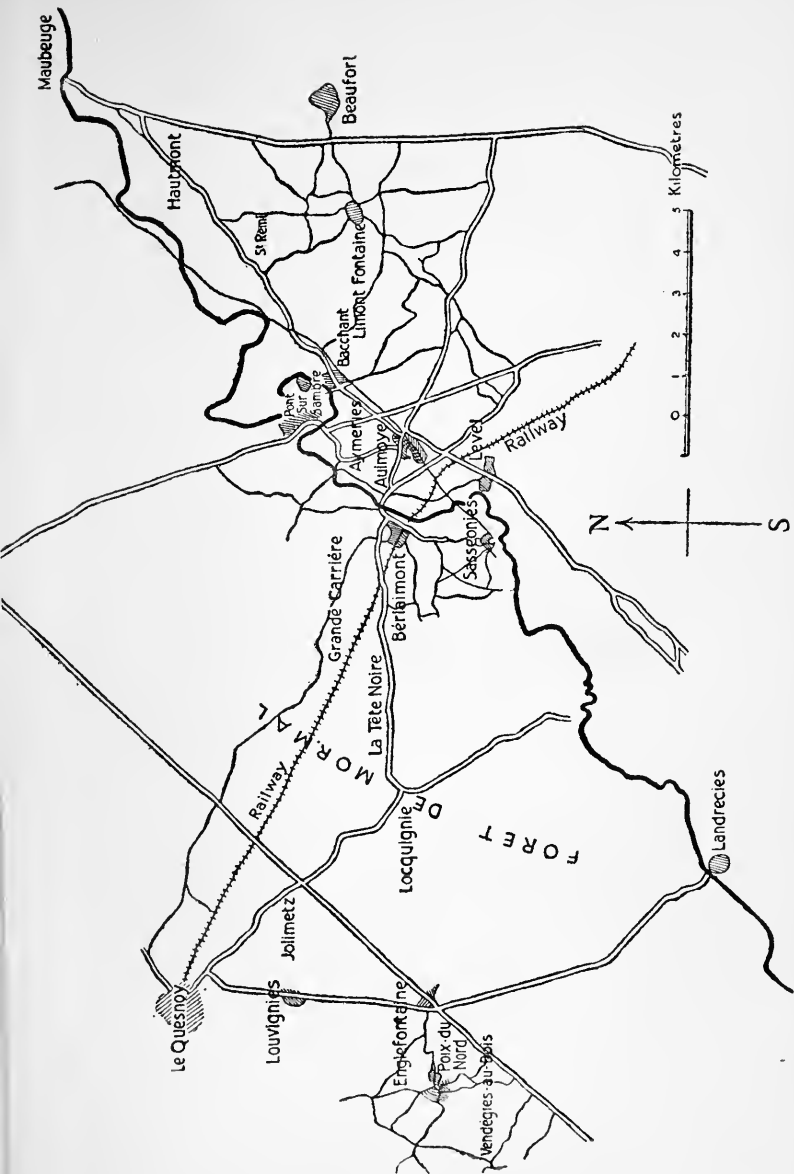
plete possession of the high ground which was so important for further operations Eastwards.

On the night of the 22nd/23rd the 50th Brigade (17th Division) relieved the 110th Brigade, which became Divisional Reserve and was concentrated in the trench system East of Maily Maillet and Englebelmer. Brigade Headquarters moved to the trench system immediately East of Beaussart.

During the 23rd, preparations were made for an attack on a big scale to take place on the whole Army front. The 5th Corps was to take the Thiepval heights and push Eastwards up the valley of the Ancre towards Pys and Le Sars. The 17th Division was to attack the heights while the 21st Division moved along the valley with the object of capturing the high ground East of Boom Ravine and South of Miraumont. The 64th Brigade was detailed to carry out the first part of the latter operation, the 110th Brigade passing through them to finish it. These orders were subsequently slightly altered owing to the suspected withdrawal of the enemy, and the 64th Brigade were ordered instead

to push straight on to the high ground East of Boom Ravine and the 110th Brigade to make for the ground South of it so as to link up with the 17th Division further South.

To carry this out the Brigade concentrated in Battery Valley at 12 midnight and formed up in order of attack with the 6th Leicesters on the right, 7th Leicesters in the centre, and 1st Wilts. on the left. This necessitated a night march over exceedingly difficult ground, combined with crossing the river over narrow footbridges—an operation requiring very careful timing arrangements and reconnaissance. The 64th Brigade assembled earlier in the night, and the 110th Brigade was to follow them. The Brigade Headquarters moved the same night from Beaussart to a dug-out in the trenches just West of Beaucourt as a temporary resting place whence communication could be obtained direct by visual signalling with the troops in the valley; this was the first occasion on which this method had been used for a long time. It was quite successful and was employed thereafter as a supplementary means



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of communication during the whole of the subsequent advance. The night assembly was carried out without any undue hitch ; but as the 6th Leicesters (the leading battalion) approached Battery Valley, they found that the Southern end, and the trench line South of it, was still held by the enemy in some force. Lieut.-Colonel Martyn, commanding the 6th Leicesters, at once realised the situation, and without hesitation or waste of time attacked at once and drove them out, capturing three trench mortars and a number of prisoners, thus clearing the valley. The consequence of this was that only the 7th Leicesters and the 1st Wilts. formed the attacking line, and the 6th Leicesters, after they had reorganised, followed in support. At 5 a.m. the Brigade started from Battery Valley and made good progress Eastwards towards their objective. The 64th Brigade, starting earlier, had gone ahead very fast and touch with them had to a great extent been lost. It afterwards transpired that they had pushed rapidly down the valley, meeting with little opposition at first, until they came to Boom Ravine ; nothing

daunted, they pushed on and after some heavy fighting seized the high ground South of Miraumont. Here, however, isolated as they were with their flanks in the air, they had considerable difficulty in holding their position; their Brigadier, General McCulloch, was wounded and their casualties severe, but their action was a very brilliant one and justified the risk taken, as it materially assisted the 42nd Division on the North and forced the early evacuation of Miraumont by the enemy. The 110th Brigade moved steadily forward, echeloned in rear of the 64th, the 17th Division on their right again being also some distance in rear, owing to their initial difficulty in gaining the heights at Thiépval.

During the whole of this advance the right flank of the Brigade was unprotected and was subjected to continual machine-gun fire. In spite of this, however, the Brigade continued to press forward. At about 9 a.m. everything seemed going well and Brigade Headquarters moved from the high ground at Beaucourt, crossed the river, and after a short halt in Battery Valley, where they joined the 6th

Leicesters, they pushed on across country in rear of the two leading battalions to where a peculiarly shaped, isolated bush grew on the bank of a sunken road, about 1,000 yards West of Boom Ravine. Here the attack was for a time held up, partially by our own barrage, which they had over-run, and partially from enfilade fire coming from the right flank. The 64th Brigade was being hard pressed, and it was of the greatest importance to get across Boom Ravine and support their right; so the Brigadier, on arrival, seeing the situation, ordered the left battalion (1st Wilts.) to push on, having sent back word for the guns to lengthen range; the 7th Leicesters were instructed to follow slightly in echelon on the right and to push out a company to the right to protect that flank. Brigade Headquarters remained for the rest of the day at the "Bush." It was not a pleasant place as, during the advance to it and at intervals afterwards, the Headquarters were severely sniped by machine-gun fire from the right by detachments of the enemy which had not as yet been cleared by the 17th Division. At one period, too, the

Bush appeared to be ranging mark for the enemy's artillery, for at a critical moment, when orders for the night's advance were being received over the telephone, it became the object of most uncalled for attention by the enemy's artillery.

All went well, however; the objective was gained at about 3 p.m. and the situation of the 64th Brigade assured. As touch could not be gained with the 17th Division and the two front line companies of the 7th Leicesters could not be found, the two support companies were ordered up to fill the gap. These former two companies, commanded by Captain Horne and Captain Vanner, had gradually been diverted from the true line of advance owing to the enfilade fire from the right to which they had been subjected during the advance, and eventually found themselves on the outskirts of Courcelette, which was on the line of advance of the 17th Division. They proceeded to occupy the village and made a considerable number of prisoners, including a battalion commander. These they handed over to the 17th Division on arrival and, next morning, rejoined

the Brigade. Apart from the loss of direction this was quite a brilliant little affair and reflected great credit on the leadership of the two officers concerned ; but they were the cause of much anxiety to the Battalion Commander and the Brigadier, who thought they must have been cut off and captured—a loss which they could ill have afforded at that moment.

Later, about 6 p.m., information was received that the 17th Division was advancing on Courcelette, and the 110th Brigade was ordered to push on at once and make good a line North-West of Le Sars and thence to push patrols into Le Sars if possible, gaining touch with the Divisions on left and right. The battalions were ordered to concentrate on the Mirau-mont Road East of Boom Ravine by 8.30 p.m., the 6th Leicesters on the left, 1st Wilts. on right, 7th Leicesters (less the two companies temporarily lost) in support. The route, which lay over the old battlefield area, was a mass of shell holes and of course had no landmarks to go by, so the march had to be conducted by compass bearing. This night march proved a most difficult operation, carried out hurriedly

as it was, and with no previous reconnaissance. Luckily the night was a moonlight one, which helped considerably. Boom Ravine itself proved a difficult obstacle, and it was no easy matter in the darkness to find the way into and out of it as the sides were precipitous and deep and the exits on the Eastern sides were few and far between.

Brigade Headquarters arrived in the road at about 8 p.m. and formed up the Brigade as they arrived. By some mischance two companies of the 6th Leicesters lost their way and did not arrive, but as time was all-important, the Brigadier ordered the movement to proceed without them and started the battalions off, while he remained at the rendezvous to send the two companies on their way when they arrived. After waiting for some time without hearing or seeing anything of them, he decided to push on, and started to march on a compass bearing to a previous selected map location on the high ground West of Le Sars which he had chosen for his Headquarters. It had been his original intention for the Headquarters to march with

the support battalion, but owing to the delay caused by the non-arrival of the two companies of the 6th Leicesters the Headquarters were now some distance in rear. He thought, however, that his small party could move quicker and catch up. As a matter of fact he lost all touch with them for the remainder of the night. After a very unpleasant march, falling into shell holes and derelict trenches and getting caught up in barbed wire, the Headquarters finally arrived at the spot they had previously selected, only to find it a very exposed place on the crest of a spur with no cover to speak of. At the moment they arrived, very heavy firing broke out from the direction of Le Sars and the spur became a most unpleasant spot, being apparently right in the line of fire, and the only available cover was in shell holes and a very derelict trench.

As there was nothing to be done in the darkness, the Brigadier decided to withdraw his Headquarters further back, and stumbling back through the darkness he came upon the Headquarters Company of the 6th Leicesters with their C.O. (Lieut.-Colonel Martyn),

who had lost touch with his front line companies. As the place where he found them was much exposed he withdrew them together with his own Headquarters to a sunken road South of Pys, and from there sent out patrols to endeavour to get touch with the battalions. Just before dawn the sunken road was very heavily shelled by the enemy but not much damage was done, although the shooting was extremely accurate. During the night Lieut.-Colonel Martyn with his Intelligence Officer, Lieut. Alcock, and his orderly, went forward to locate his forward companies; but in the darkness they walked into a quarry located on the road, just North-West of Le Sars; here he was ambushed and, after a struggle, was captured and his orderly killed. Lieut. Alcock, however, managed to escape and brought back word of what had happened. By dawn the two forward companies of the 6th Leicesters had been located, but touch had not been gained with either the 1st Wilts. or the 7th Leicesters.

As can be imagined, the Brigadier was somewhat harassed and anxious. He decided at

dawn to go himself and locate the missing troops and started off accordingly, accompanied by his Brigade-Major, Captain Ozanne of the Duke of Wellington's Regiment, a keen, capable, active young officer.

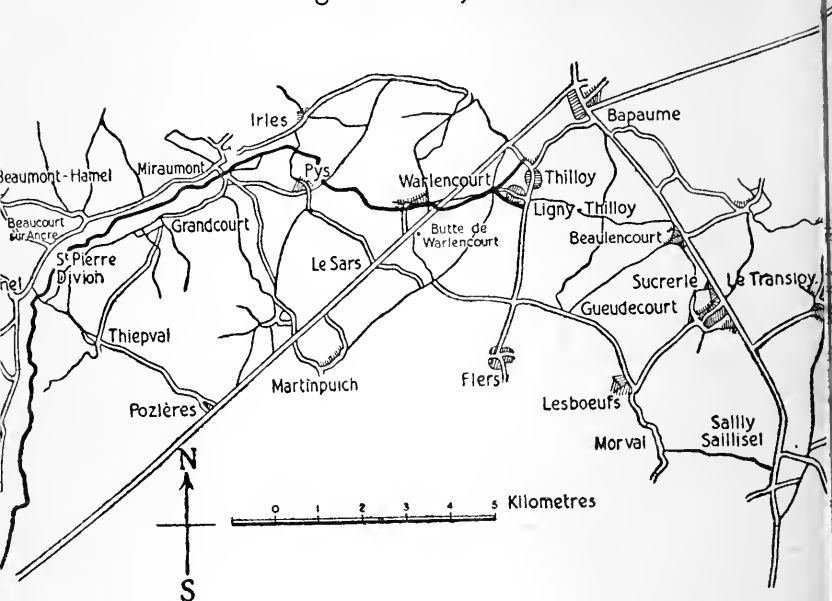
The plan of operations for this day was for the 62nd Brigade at dawn to pass through the 110th Brigade and capture Le Sars and the trench line North of it, after which the 110th Brigade was to pass through and capture the road line still further East.

The Brigadier and Brigade-Major started off in a thick mist and made for the places where the objective of the 1st Wilts. had been, according to plan. On their way they came across the 62nd Brigade advancing. They reached the high ground West of Le Sars just as the mist lifted, and found the leading troops in the act of attacking the village. The high ground was no place to remain on long, as the whole area was alive with machine-gun bullets fired at the attackers and supports in rear, so they hastened their steps to a small valley where cover was obtainable. Here they found the 62nd Brigade Headquarters but no sign

of the Wiltshire Regiment, who however were near at hand, having successfully attained their original objective during the night. In the hurly-burly of a desperate attack such as the taking of Le Sars proved to be, it was impossible to discover anything, so the Brigadier, considerably worried, decided to return; but as the fog lifted and the country became visible, he eventually found the 7th Leicesters and established his Headquarters with them. Shortly afterwards touch was obtained with the 1st Wilts., the two missing companies of the 6th Leicesters arrived, and later also the other two of the 7th Leicesters, who had strayed to Courcellette. The 62nd Brigade having been successful at Le Sars, the 110th Brigade was ordered to push through and capture the road line further East. The Brigade therefore concentrated south of Pys, the 6th and 7th Leicesters forming the front line, with the 1st Wilts. in support. At about 2 p.m., while the Brigade was moving to its assembly positions prior to starting for the attack, the Brigade Headquarters moved to the Headquarters of the 62nd Brigade for the oper-

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ation. On arrival the Brigadier found the 62nd Brigade being heavily counter-attacked. He immediately sent off his Brigade-Major to the two leading battalions, with orders for them

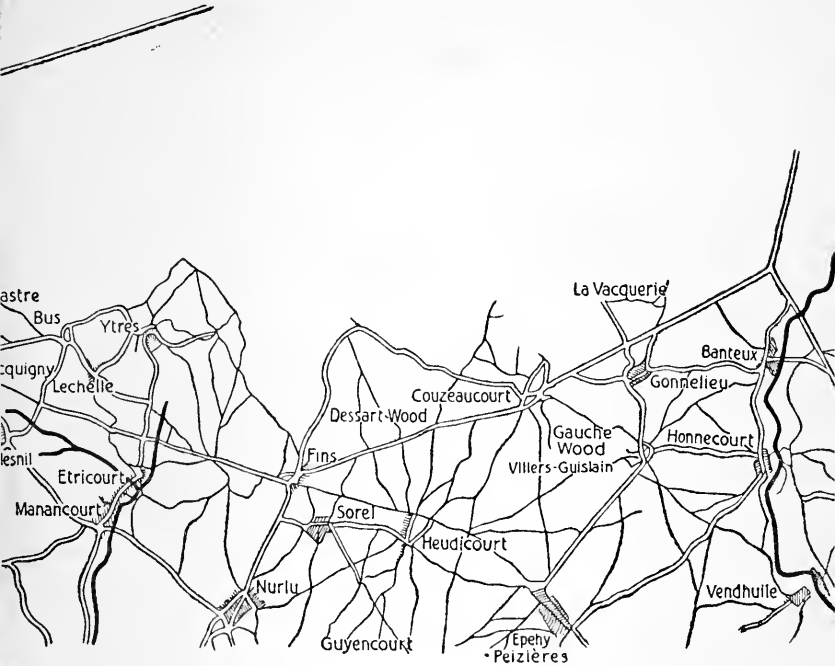


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to press on quickly and attack at once, giving verbal orders to the Battalion Commanders as to the direction and task of each battalion. The 1st Wilts. he ordered to stand fast, West

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of Le Sars. The 6th and 7th Leicesters changed direction, and quickly grasping the



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situation, moved rapidly forward and attacked in their turn the flank of the Boche counter-attack. By 3.30 p.m. the enemy had been completely repulsed but the original attack

had been cancelled. The 6th and 7th Leicesters however remained in line under the tactical orders of the 62nd Brigade, and the 1st Wilts. withdrew to their original position West of Le Sars. Brigade Headquarters took up their quarters in a trench just West of Le Sars in shelters which had been occupied shortly before by a German artillery brigade. They had only been recently built and were comparatively clean.

Here an amusing incident occurred which caused great laughter and, if meant for a joke by the Hun, was a very successful one. In examining the mess hut a very unpleasant looking red bomb was found embedded between the sandbag wall and the door post. Warnings had been issued about "booby traps," and this had every appearance of being one; preparations were therefore made to remove it. After everything of value had been removed from the hut a long line of telephone wire was procured and one end very gingerly tied round the bottom of the bomb, the other end being led to a trench some thirty yards away; from this secure position it was decided to pull the

bomb out. On the first pull the wire broke. This was repeated four times with the same result, but the fifth effort proved successful. Out came the bomb—it was empty! The question was (and is) whether it was a leg-pull or not.

At dawn on the 26th the 64th Brigade went through the 62nd Brigade and captured the high ground South of La Barque. The 62nd Brigade then attempted to exploit this success but were unable to advance more than two or three hundred yards owing to the heavy enfilade fire from La Barque and Ligny Thillois.

The 17th Division had reached Martinpuich and the 63rd Division on the left was believed to be holding La Barque, but apparently not the Southern part of the village.

The 6th Leicesters, now commanded by Major Burdett, were withdrawn South of Warlencourt, but the 7th Leicesters remained with the 62nd Brigade. On the 27th, at dawn, the 110th Brigade moved forward with the line of the Thillois—Lusenhof Farm Road as their objective, with the 6th Leicesters on the left, the 1st Wilts. on the right and the

7th Leicesters in support. Brigade Headquarters had moved forward to the Butte de Warlencourt, a very prominent landmark which had the appearance of a slag heap, standing about a hundred feet higher than the surrounding country. The Brigadier was watching the advance of the troops from the top: they had already reached the line of the road called Blue Cut when a telephone message was handed to him telling him that the attack was cancelled and that the troops were to be withdrawn. Prompt action was necessary. He flew down to his Headquarters at the base of the mound and quickly got his Brigade-Major and another officer to run and stop the two leading regiments. There was no other means of communicating, the battalions being on the move. The two officers being young and active eventually succeeded in stopping them, but not before the 6th Leicesters had suffered some casualties from machine-gun fire from the left flank.

The attack was cancelled owing to the 17th and 63rd Divisions not attacking on the South and North at Guedecourt and Le Thillois

respectively, as had been arranged beforehand. The Brigade withdrew to its old position, West of Le Sars.

The 28th was a quiet day and the troops got a rest, which they badly needed. At 3 p.m. however the Brigade was ordered to relieve the 62nd Brigade in the front line. The relief was effected that night, the front line being the line of Yellow Cut Road, where junction was obtained with the 42nd Division at La Barque and with the 17th Division just East of Eaucourt L'Abbaye. At 9 p.m. information was received that the 38th Division was attacking on the South, in the direction of Ginchy, at 5.30 a.m. This attack proved to be successful, and the enemy started to retire all along the line. The two front line battalions were ordered to push forward advance guards and make ground "by bounds" Eastwards. In this way they were able to advance as far as the high ground West of Beaulencourt. Further progress was not possible, as the enemy were holding the Bapaume-Peronne Road in strength. The 1st Wilts. on the right and the 7th Leicesters on the left

proceeded to consolidate, the 6th Leicesters in support being on the reverse slope of the high ground East of the Lusenhof Farm Road. Brigade Headquarters occupied a filthy dug-out in the trench system just South of the farm.

The enemy shelled the forward battalions very heavily that night, but showed no disposition to attack. Beaulencourt was shelled by us during the night until 2 a.m., at which hour patrols were pushed forward to reconnoitre. These patrols were only able to get to about 300 yards from the Western outskirts of the village as the latter was found to be very strongly held by machine guns. On the morning of the 30th, and again during the night of the 30th/31st, the bombardment was repeated and patrols sent out with the same result.

Meanwhile the 42nd Division on the left attacked and captured Riencourt, East of the Bapaume Road, but the right Division found Le Transloy strongly occupied. At 10 a.m. on the 31st the Division intimated that the Brigade would have to be prepared to attack

Beaulencourt, and alternative schemes for a night or day attack were prepared. A daylight operation would have necessitated a frontal attack, but a night attack which allowed a certain amount of manœuvring could take the position from the flank. The approaches to Beaulencourt from the front presented a glaxis-like slope with no cover, which would have made a frontal attack very risky and costly. A night attack from the North however presented less difficulties and would introduce the element of surprise. Moreover the necessary movements could be made under cover of darkness.

The latter plan was eventually decided on, and orders were issued with the artillery programme, for the attack to take place the following morning (1st September) at 2 a.m. The plan of attack was that the 6th Leicesters on the left, with their left on the Bapaume Road and the 1st Wilts. on the right, were to form up in the valley running South-West from the Bapaume Road and immediately West of Riencourt, and move parallel with the Road, preceded by an enfilade artillery and machine-

gun barrage, and capture and occupy the village. The 7th Leicesters, in the meanwhile, were to hold the trench line West of Beaulencourt.

At 7 p.m. the Division ordered a supplementary attack to be made on the Sugar Factory North of Le Transloy at 5.30 the same morning, in conjunction with an attack on Le Transloy by the 17th Division: the 7th Leicesters were ordered to carry out this attack with one company.

The attack on Beaulencourt was completely successful: as a flank attack, it obviously took the enemy completely by surprise. The 6th Leicesters and 1st Wilts. swept through the village and, after some very heavy fighting in which good use was made of Lewis guns and trench mortars, the whole of the village was captured and a position consolidated round the Eastern and South-Eastern portions of it. The captures included three officers and 130 men, two field guns, nine anti-tank guns, 4 trench mortars and 36 machine guns, as well as a Field Hospital more or less intact.

The attack by the 7th Leicesters did not materialise as, owing to the short time available for reconnaissance, the company detailed failed to reach the forming up line. An enemy counter-attack on the South-East corner of the village was beaten off by the 1st Wiltshires.

The attack on Le Transloy failed. At 2 a.m. on the 2nd the 7th Leicesters attacked the Sugar Factory with three companies. The operation was followed at 5 a.m. by a general attack all along the line, the 64th Brigade going through the 110th Brigade towards the high ground East of the Bapaume Road, the 4th Corps on the left attacking Villers-auf-Flos and the 17th Division making an encircling attack on Le Transloy from North and South. The Sugar Factory was captured by 5 a.m. and the 64th Brigade and 4th Corps attacks were successful; but the enemy fought desperately for Le Transloy. At 10 a.m. the Sugar Factory was heavily shelled and retaken, but by 11.30 a.m. the situation was restored, the 7th Leicesters regaining the Sugar Factory, and the 17th Division cleared Le Transloy and

pushed on to the high ground East of the road. Here the 17th Division gained touch with the 2nd Division of the 4th Corps and thus pinched out the 21st Division. The 64th Brigade was therefore withdrawn, and the day ended with the 7th Leicesters holding a line from the Sugar Factory to the high ground in rear of the 17th Division, with the 6th Leicesters garrisoning Beaulencourt, the 1st Wilts. being withdrawn into support in the original trench line. Brigade Headquarters moved from the dug-out near Lusenhof Farm to some huts in a sunken road West of Riencourt, near the Bapaume road—a very pleasant change.

The 42nd and 17th Divisions pressed on during the 3rd, captured Barastre and Rocquigny, and pushed forward beyond these villages. The 110th Brigade withdrew to Divisional Reserve. The Division for the next two days was in Corps Reserve and was able to obtain a little rest which was badly needed. It was wonderful what these short periods of rest did for the men. After constant fighting, moving with little rest or sleep and with

periods during which the tactical situation did not admit of proper food being taken, the men at times were strained to the limit of human endurance. Fatigue became almost a pain ; yet one day's complete rest with good hot food and a comprehensive wash, worked wonders. Of course the moral effect of advancing and hammering the Boche was a great asset in keeping the men going, and added to their ardour. Their tails were right over their backs ; fatigue and hardship no longer counted.

On September 5 the 21st Division again came into the line, relieving the 38th Division which had pushed on East of the Canal du Nord in the vicinity of Manancourt and Etricourt. The 110th Brigade, in Divisional Reserve, moved to Sailly-Saillisel. Here they remained till the 7th, when they moved forward to the Canal du Nord about Manancourt and Etricourt. Brigade Headquarters were established in a very comfortable hutted camp in Manancourt, formerly a German Corps Headquarters. In the meanwhile the front line troops had been pressing steadily

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but slowly forward in the face of gradually increasing opposition. On the 9th, the 17th Division on the North had reached the old trench line South of Gouzeaucourt, the 64th and 62nd Infantry Brigades continuing the line South through Revelon Farm and East of Heudicourt, where the 58th Division joined up with them, carrying the line further South, just to the West of Peizière.

During the night 9th/10th the 110th Brigade relieved the 62nd Brigade in the line. On the 10th instructions were received to the effect that the 110th Brigade would extend its line to the North, relieving the 64th Brigade, and attack the trench line running South from Chapel Hill. Accordingly the 1st Wilts. carried out the relief on the night 10th/11th, and the 7th Leicesters made the attack on the morning of the 11th. This attack was successful, 50 prisoners and a number of machine guns being captured, but some difficulty was experienced in gaining touch with the 1st Wilts. on the North owing to the pocket of the enemy holding out in Chapel Redoubt. Complete touch was not gained until the 6th Leicesters

relieved the 7th Battalion on the night of the 12th/13th.

At 9.20 a.m. on the 13th a deserter from the enemy was brought into Brigade Headquarters. On examination he stated that a Flamenwerfer attack would take place about Chapel Hill as part of a larger operation at 10 a.m. There was very little time to be lost if advantage was to be taken of this information. Battalions were warned, the Division was rung up and asked to bring the heavy artillery into action at once, and the Brigadier himself dashed across the road to the supporting F.A. Brigade Headquarters, who were fortunately near at hand, to bring the field guns into action at once to forestall the attack. The enemy's opening barrage and our own commenced at about the same moment, 9.45 a.m., our guns making beautiful shooting on the enemy trenches where they should have been forming up for the attack. Sure enough, the enemy started their attack with flamenwerfer at 10 a.m. The counter-attack after a short, though sharp, fight was beaten off. The enemy gained a temporary footing in the vicinity of Chapel

Redoubt, but were soon ejected by an immediate and well organised counter-attack delivered by a platoon of the 1st Wilts., leaving nine prisoners and one machine gun in our hands. This attack caused the enemy a considerable number of casualties.

The 21st Division was now working over ground with which it was very familiar as they had borne the German onslaught of March 21st while holding this part of the front. It was a curious experience, finding themselves working back over this old ground, where many evidences of our former occupation were found; the Brigadier himself found in an old dug-out which he occupied as a Headquarters, and which had been the Headquarters of the 12th/13th Northumberland Fusiliers in March, 1918, an old cheque-book in which the last cheque drawn was dated March 19.

The night of the 16th was a most unpleasant one for Brigade Headquarters, which were under canvas in the vicinity of a sunken road immediately West of Manancourt. Dinner had just been finished about six p.m. and all were very busy with orders and preparations

for the coming attack, when without warning an enemy aeroplane dropped 6 bombs into the small camp. A direct hit was obtained on the office tent; Sergeant Winney, the chief "G" clerk, was killed instantaneously and Private Osie, assistant clerk, so badly wounded that he died shortly afterwards. Typewriter, stationery, files and correspondence were of course blown to atoms. The Brigade despatch rider was also killed. Altogether, out of a total of 30 officers and men, the casualties amounted to 6 killed and 10 wounded. There were some extraordinary escapes. The Officers' Mess tent was riddled with splinters but none of the officers were touched, although all were blown off their feet by the force of the explosion.

The Brigade had been relieved by the 19th Brigade (33rd Division) during the night of the 15th/16th and withdrawn to the West of the Canal du Nord near Manancourt. At noon that day (16th) orders were received for an operation on a big scale and on a wide front, to take place on the morning of the 18th.

The scheme for the 21st Divisional attack was for the 62nd Brigade to capture the trenches East of the railway between, and including, Vaucelette Farm and Peizière. After this the 110th Brigade on the right and the 64th Brigade on the left, were to go through and capture the trench system running West and South of Villers Guislain, whereupon the 110th Brigade was to exploit further East to protect the flank of the 12th Division, who, further South, was to attack Epéhy and the trench system East of it.

It was decided to make the attack with the 6th Leicesters on the right and 1st Wilts. on the left, the 7th Leicesters being in support. The battalions moved about 9 a.m. and marched to the assembly position near Heudicourt whence they were to follow the 62nd Brigade when the attack started. Brigade Headquarters moved to a dug-out in a sunken road just South of Heudicourt where the 62nd Brigade was already established, and later, when the attack started, they moved forward to a similar one in a sunken road just West of the railway and South of Chapel Hill.

The attack started just before dawn. The 62nd Brigade took their objective, and the 110th then passed through them. The 6th Leicesters on the right found their right flank exposed and had some difficulty in clearing the trenches just North of Peizière. They pushed on as far as 14 Willows Road, but were obliged to halt here and throw out a defensive flank as the 12th Division had failed to take Epéhy, thus leaving this flank exposed to an enfilade fire from the enemy trenches East of the village. The leading companies of the 1st Wilts. reached their final objective, but owing to the lack of support on their right were eventually compelled to withdraw to the high ground East of 14 Willows Road where they remained, throwing their flank back to the road itself. By 10.30 a.m. the supporting battalion, the 7th Leicesters, reached the line of 14 Willows Road, immediately in rear of the 1st Wilts., and consolidated a position there. The 64th Brigade had captured their final objective and was firmly established. The 38th Division on the right, however, was only in possession of the trenches immediately

East of Peizière and could not advance further. The operation, on the whole, had been very successful; 20 officers, 400 men and 8 field guns were captured, but exploitation further East was stopped by the failure on the right, Epéhy not having been taken. At 9 p.m. orders were received to renew the attack next morning, but these were subsequently cancelled and the Brigade was relieved by the 19th Brigade, 33rd Division, on the following night (19th/20th), and again withdrew to Manancourt.

From the 21st to the 23rd, the Division rested in this area. The 5th Corps had been reinforced by the 33rd Division, so the four Divisions were organised into a right and left wing, the 38th and 33rd relieving each other on the right and the 17th and 21st doing the same on the left. On the night of the 25th/26th the 110th Brigade relieved the 51st Brigade (17th Division) in the sector East of Gauche Wood, running as far North as Quentin Hill; the 6th Leicesters on the right, the 7th Leicesters on the left and the 1st Wilts. in support, Brigade Headquarters in dug-outs at Chapel

Hill. Here the 110th Brigade remained, the 62nd Brigade on their left holding a trench line running round the South and West edges of Gouzeaucourt.

Information was received from the 4th Corps on the morning of the 28th that the enemy were withdrawing on their front, and later in the morning the 62nd Brigade was able to push through Gouzeaucourt as far East as the railway. The 6th and 7th Leicesters were thereupon ordered to push out patrols and occupy the trench line West of Gonnellieu. By 5 p.m. this operation was complete.

On the 29th, at 3 p.m., the 62nd and 110th Brigades attacked Eastwards, the 62nd Brigade attacking Gonnellieu and the 110th Brigade the trench line South of it. The 6th Leicesters led the attack, followed by the 1st Wilts., who were to pass through them at a later stage. The attack however was not a success, the enemy held the high ground in strength and with great determination—evidently to allow other troops to get across the Canal. The 6th Leicesters were unable

to advance owing to heavy machine-gun fire; one company on the extreme right got forward and captured the cemetery North-West of Villers Guislain and part of the trench line North of the cemetery; but here the attack was held up. The 62nd Brigade was also unable to advance through Gonnelleu. The 4th Corps attack from the North had its effect next day, the enemy evacuating Gonnelleu; both Brigades then pushed forward and finally drove the enemy across the Canal and consolidated the old trench line on the high ground West of Bantouzelle to Honne-court Wood. Here the advance halted for two days, while preparations to attack and cross the Canal were completed. Brigade Headquarters, meanwhile, had moved to the Quarry just East of Gouzeaucourt, which proved a nice change from the dug-out on Chapel Hill. It was not so safe, perhaps, but the shelling in the back area was not so severe, and the comfort of being in the open air was well worth the risk. The atmosphere in a dug-out was invariably damp and stuffy, and the Brigadier always felt it a wrench to

leave the fresh air and descend into the black depths, though never unmindful of the immortal Captain Corcoran :—

“ But when the breezes blow
I generally go below,
And seek the seclusion that a cabin
grants.”

On the 3rd the 62nd Brigade was withdrawn and the 110th Brigade took over the whole of the Divisional front, having two battalions in the front line (7th Leicesters on the left and the 1st Wilts. on the right), and the 6th Leicesters in support. Constant patrolling was carried out towards the Canal to keep touch with the enemy, but patrols were invariably engaged by machine guns on approaching the Canal bank. At dawn on the 5th however patrols of the Brigade on the right crossed the Canal at Honnecourt, and by 8.30 a.m. had occupied a line East of it. The two front line battalions were at once ordered to cross the Canal. This was carried out, but only with considerable difficulty owing to the bridges having been destroyed.

Once across, they pushed on rapidly under advanced guards and found the whole of the Hindenburg Line evacuated. This they occupied and sent patrols to the East of it. The 6th Leicesters meanwhile moved to Banteux Spur in readiness to cross the Canal, which they did later in the afternoon. By the evening the whole Brigade was occupying the Hindenburg Line with an outpost line in front of it. Brigade Headquarters moved forward to a position West of the Canal. During the afternoon the 64th Brigade passed through the Hindenburg Line to occupy the Beaurevoir Line which was reported clear, but meeting with strong opposition they were unable to advance far. The next day Brigade Headquarters moved to the Hindenburg Line and, during the 7th, preparations were made for a further advance on the 8th on a big scale. The 21st Division was to capture the Nasmières-Beaurevoir system and Walincourt and the high ground to the North of it. Divisions on the right and left were also advancing on a wide front. The plan for the Divisional attack was for the 64th Brigade (right) and the 110th

Brigade (left) to capture the Beaurevoir Line between Angle Chateau and Ardissart Farm, after which two battalions of the 110th Brigade would form up South of Ardissart Farm, facing North, and attack Northwards, the objective being the Beaurevoir Line and the high ground immediately East of it as far North as Hurtebise Farm, where junction with the 37th Division could be established. This operation completed, the 62nd Brigade was to pass through and capture Walincourt and the high ground North of it. The 1st Wilts. were detailed for the initial stages of the 110th Brigade attack, the 6th and 7th Leicesters carrying out the final stage. Zero hour for the first stage was 1 a.m. (8th). The assembly march of the 1st Wilts. was successfully carried out in spite of an exceptionally dark night. The attack was delivered with great dash, although the wire was thick and practically undamaged. Their objective in conjunction with that of the 64th Brigade was made good. The fighting in and around Angle Chateau, however, went on till mid-day as it was strongly and tenaciously held by machine-gun posts.

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At 5 a.m. the 6th and 7th Leicesters formed up on the line of a communication trench South of Ardissart Farm. This was no easy operation in the pitch-black night, more especially as the communication trench in question was barely a foot deep and therefore extremely difficult to find. Again the attack was everywhere successful, and was certainly the surprise it was intended to be; 624 prisoners, 4 field guns, 67 machine guns and 6 trench mortars were the tangible results of this attack. At 8 o'clock the 62nd Brigade passed through for their advance on Walincourt. By 1 p.m. the front had been reorganised, the 64th Brigade extending northwards to Haut Farm, the remainder of the front to Hurtebise Farm being held by the 6th Leicesters. The 1st Wilts. and 7th Leicesters were ordered to move North and concentrate West of Briseux Wood in readiness to attack Guillemin Farm and the high ground East of it, but this idea was subsequently modified by the 62nd Brigade carrying out this attack, the 1st Wilts. being lent to them as a supporting battalion. This operation, carried out at 4.30 p.m., was suc-

cessful to start with, but a strong counter-attack drove it back to the line of the Sargrenon brook in the valley. Walincourt was however taken and remained in our hands. During the late afternoon Brigade Headquarters moved to a dug-out at Montecouvrier Farm. This was a most successful day, although an arduous combination of hard fighting with a long advance. On going over the ground next day it was astounding to see the depth and thickness of the wire, practically undamaged, through which the troops had forced a passage. Moreover the intense darkness made the feat all the more marvellous.

The second attack, from the South, was evidently a great surprise to the enemy and had the advantage of evading the wire by getting behind it. The large haul of machine guns was undoubtedly due to this fact.

The 17th Division came through on the 9th and pushed forward, the enemy retiring in front of them. The 110th Brigade moved forward on the 10th and went into billets at Caullery, where they remained resting, training and reorganising till the 22nd.

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On the 13th, the Brigadier was able to get a few days' leave to England. He arrived in London on the 14th, but on the evening of the 16th received a wire to return at once, so he left again on the morning of the 16th, getting back to Caullery by the evening of the 17th. It was a hurried journey, but well worth the trouble ; for the rest and good food and a sleep in a good bed for a few nights made a great difference. The troops had also benefited considerably by their ten days' respite in comfortable billets—a thing they had not seen for a long time. New drafts arrived and were organised with the battalions and received some training. The devastated area had now been left behind and the enemy had no time to destroy the towns and villages, although he did his best by blowing down every church that he had the time and opportunity to destroy—an unnecessary and disgraceful act of vandalism for which there was no excuse whatever. When the Division moved forward again it was in great fettle with the battalions nearly up to strength ; and the men, refreshed and rested, were full of themselves after their

previous successes and eager to continue the advance and give the enemy something of that which they themselves had suffered earlier in the year.

On the morning of the 22nd orders were issued for an attack on a big scale on the 3rd and 4th Army Fronts, the 5th Corps attacking, with the 33rd Division on the right and the 21st Division on the left. The scheme was a comprehensive one and made provision for a long advance to be carried out "by bounds"—a series of objectives being attacked and captured in succession by different formations. The 21st Division in this had five objectives allotted to it: (1) The high ground North-East of Amerval; (2) A line of road running along a spur East of Ovillers; (3) Vendegie village and the line of road running South of it; (4) The high plateau West of Poix-du-Nord; (5) The high ground East of Poix-du-Nord and the outskirts of the Forêt de Mormal.

The 110th Brigade on the left, in conjunction with the 64th Brigade on the right, were ordered to take the first three of these objectives, the 62nd Brigade then passing through and

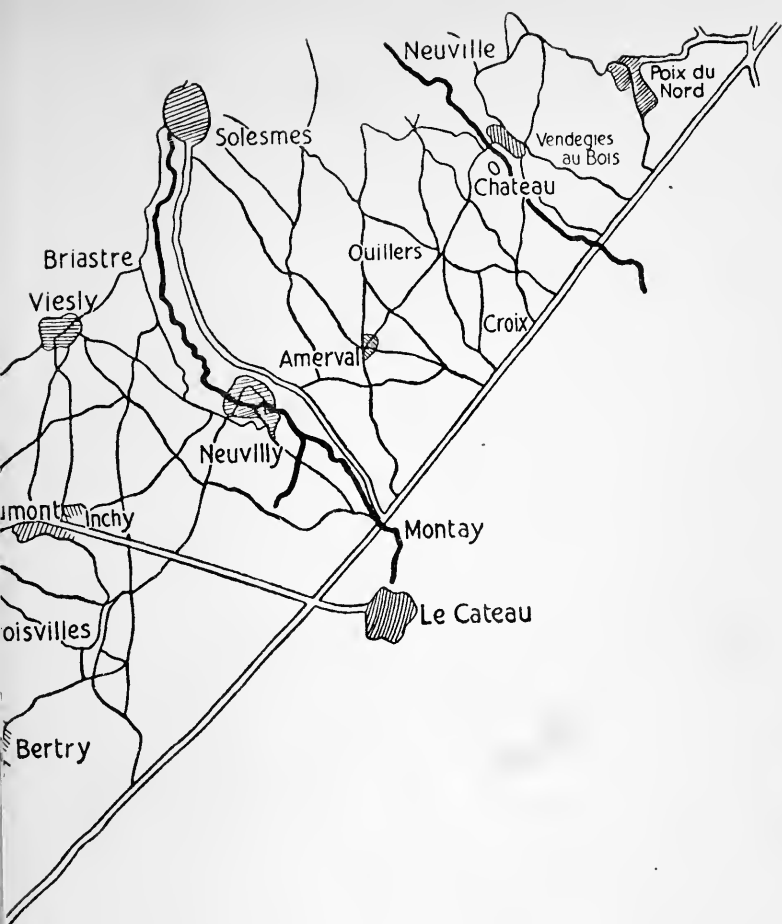
accounting for the remainder. The Brigade orders were for the 1st Wilts. on the right and the 7th Leicesters on the left to capture the first two of the objectives allotted. On completion of this phase the 6th Leicesters were to pass through and make good the line of Vendegie village. As a preliminary to this operation the 21st Division took over the line held by the 17th Division on the night of the 22nd/23rd, the 6th Leicesters taking over from the 52nd Brigade the front allotted to the 110th Brigade, roughly along the ridge North and South of Amerval.

Zero hour for the attack was 2 a.m. on the 23rd. By 12.30 a.m. the 7th Leicesters and 1st Wilts. had formed up along their assembly position, the line of road running East of Amerval. When in position, the enemy heavily bombarded the Brigade front, this particular road coming in for a large share of the shelling, which caused very heavy casualties and considerable disorganisation among the battalions. In spite of this initial disadvantage both regiments advanced according to programme and captured their first objective up to time.

In moving forward however to their second objective, they encountered heavy opposition, and delay was caused by the Brigade on the left being held up at the Red House. By means of the support afforded by the 6th Leicesters this opposition was overcome, and by 7.15 a.m. a message was received to the effect that the 6th Leicesters were in position and ready to advance. This battalion then passed through and advanced towards the third objective. Here they met with strenuous opposition, chiefly from Dukes Wood, which was full of machine guns. The advance was held up for some time until one company succeeded in working round the southern edge of the wood to the Chateau, thus out-flanking the position. From this point the advance was resumed without much difficulty, the third objective being in our hands by 10 a.m. Patrols were pushed out through the village and the exits were held before the leading troops of the 62nd Brigade passed through at about 10.30 a.m.

Brigade Headquarters during these manoeuvres moved from Inchy to Neuville and

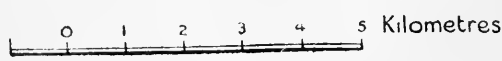




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THE COUNTER-OFFENSIVE (October 3–October 24, 1918).

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from thence to a small copse North-East of Amerval at 11 a.m. At 3.30 p.m. news arrived of the capture of the fourth objective by the 62nd Brigade, but further advance was impossible. At 3.45 p.m. the Brigade was concentrated ready to move forward, the 6th Leicesters in Vendegie, the 7th Leicesters North of Ovillers, the 1st Wilts. holding the line of the second objective in readiness to move forward. Brigade Headquarters were established at Ovillers. No further movement was possible that day, but the advance was ordered to be continued the next day (24th), the 62nd and 64th Brigades to attack and make good the line of the road through Grand Gay Farm, a further advance to be undertaken by the 110th Brigade with the Jolimetz-Le Quesnoy Road as objective. The operations this day had again been most successful; the Brigade had captured 340 prisoners and made good all its objectives. The flank movement of the company round Dukes Wood had been a particularly good bit of work, showing great initiative and excellent leading on the part of the officers concerned. By means of this

outflanking movement Vendegie Chateau was surrounded before the German Regimental Commander, whose headquarters it was, could get away and he was captured with most of his staff. The attack was resumed on the 24th, the leading battalions of the Brigade, the 1st Wilts. on the right and the 7th Leicesters on the left, crossing the high ground North-East of Vendegie at 7 a.m., keeping in close touch with the progress of the attack. Brigade Headquarters moved to Vendegie Chateau at 8 a.m. On arrival there news was received that the first objective (the high ground North-East of Poix-du-Nord) had been captured, and that the advance was being continued. The Brigadier therefore pushed on with an advanced Headquarters to Poix-du-Nord, leaving word for the remainder to follow later.

The situation at noon however showed that further advance East of the first objective was definitely stopped by heavy machine-gun fire and a greater measure of artillery fire than had hitherto been experienced. The 7th Leicesters and 1st Wilts. had reached and halted on the line of the Fontaine le Conte-

brook, North of Poix, the 6th Leicesters being in position on the plateau West of the village. There they remained till 2 p.m. when the battalions were ordered back, the 6th Leicesters to Vendegie, the 7th Leicesters and 1st Wilts. to a position on the plateau. Brigade Headquarters returned to Vendegie Chateau. No further change in the situation occurred that day.

On the 25th little advance was made as patrols reported the enemy holding the line of Grand Gay Farm Road very strongly with infantry and machine guns. That night, the 25th/26th, the 110th Brigade relieved the 62nd and 64th Brigades in the line and Brigade Headquarters moved to Poix-du-Nord. At 1 a.m. (26th) patrols were pushed out from the front line under a Field Artillery barrage, and posts were established about 300 yards in advance.

The following night (26th/27th) the Brigade was relieved by the 52nd Brigade, 17th Division, the 110th Brigade Headquarters moving to Ovillers, the 6th Leicesters and 1st Wilts. to billets in Ovillers and the 7th Leicesters

to camp near Amerval. Two nights later (29th/30th), the Brigade relieved the 52nd Brigade in the same line as that held prior to the previous relief. The Brigade remained in the line till the end of the month, the area being shelled very heavily at times. Poix itself received considerable attention, mainly between dusk and dawn, with a certain amount of gas. The billets were good in Poix, but it was hardly a safe place of residence.

On the night of the 2nd/3rd of November the Division was relieved by the 17th Division, the 52nd Brigade again relieving the 110th Brigade, which withdrew to Ovillers.

On the 3rd, orders were received that the 1st French Army, together with the 3rd and 4th and 1st British Armies, were to resume the offensive on November 4. Up till now the advance had been carried out in a North-Easterly direction, but the further operations now to take place were to be carried out due East. This necessitated a partial wheel to the right and meant attacking through the Forêt de Mormal from West to East—a strenuous proposition if the latter proved to be tena-

ciously held. The 17th Division was to clear the Forêt de Mormal up to Locquignol in the first day's operation. The 21st Division on the following day was to pass through the 17th Division, endeavour to cross the river Sambre and establish a line East of it. This meant an advance of over 12,000 yards during the two days.

On the 4th the operations started, the 17th Division advancing with apparently little opposition and was swallowed up in the forest. The 21st Division meanwhile assembled in the area West of the forest, near Futoy, ready to move forward. Brigade Headquarters moved in the afternoon to a small house near Futoy. On arriving after dark at this place, the Brigadier, accompanied by his Brigade-Major (Capt. Ozanne) and Intelligence Officer (Capt. Victor Kelly, a brilliant and gallant product of young Oxford,) found the house in direst confusion. It had evidently been hit by one of our shells and had also been systematically ransacked by the Hun before evacuation. All hands had to turn to to make it fit for occupation; two dead Germans amongst other

things were disposed of before anything else was done.

By the evening it was reported that the 17th Division had reached a line in the forest about 2,000 yards short of their original objective. The morning of the 5th was misty and damp, and this subsequently turned to a continuous rain which lasted till the end of the operations. It was a cheerless morning when the 62nd Brigade led off the advance at about dawn, the 110th Brigade following close in the rear in close touch with the support battalion of that Brigade. Brigade Headquarters had moved at 6 a.m. and joined with the 62nd Brigade at Pont à Vache. As soon as the 62nd Brigade had moved off and the 110th Brigade had formed up ready to start, the Brigadier moved off in advance of the head of the column and established Headquarters in advance of the Brigade at the Institute Forestier, about the centre of the forest, on the Locquignol—Tête Noire Road, which was reached about 8.30 a.m. In the meanwhile reports came in that the 52nd Brigade was steadily advancing and had reached a line Tête Noire—Grande Carrière and

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were moving forward towards the Sambre at Berlaimont without much opposition.

As soon as this news was received the Brigadier rode on to Tête Noire, leaving word for the column to follow, and joined the 62nd Brigade Headquarters established in the village. Here it was found that further advance was being strenuously opposed in and around Berlaimont, and the advance was held up for a time. It was decided that the 110th Brigade should not attempt to advance till the 62nd Brigade could establish themselves East of Berlaimont and prepare bridge-heads to cover the crossing. At 11.15 a.m. the head of the Brigade column arrived at Tête Noire. Their march had been much delayed by the congestion on the road caused by the large and deep craters which had been blown by the Boche in the road, at Locquignol and West of Tête Noire. It was pouring with rain, too, which made the roads through the forest very muddy and difficult.

The further advance of the 62nd Brigade showed every sign of being delayed for the remainder of the day, so the 110th Brigade was ordered to billet in Tête Noire. Brigade

Headquarters were established in a farm house on the Eastern side of it, and preparations were made and orders issued for the attack and crossing of the Sambre the following day.

The 62nd Brigade had cleared Berlaimont during the evening, and during the night had been able to push across small parties at the Lock, where they occupied a very restricted position, but had managed to improvise a bridge over the shattered remains of the masonry of the Lock. This bridge merely consisted of single planks about two feet wide, laid zigzag across the dilapidated masonry, with no handrail or supports on either side. It was a most rickety structure over which to cross troops on a pitch dark and rainy night, the more so as the river below was swift running. By this contrivance the 6th Leicesters and 1st Wilts.—the former on the left and the latter on the right—managed to cross the river at 5.30 p.m. and established themselves along the Eastern bank of the river in readiness to advance. Brigade Headquarters moved forward and established themselves at a house on the Western outskirts of Berlaimont. Up till 8.30 a.m. no

advance could be made owing to the heavy machine-gun fire from Aulnoye and the direct artillery fire from batteries posted on the high ground East of it. The 6th Leicesters however managed to extend their flank slightly by capturing and occupying the Factory, and also pushed a patrol up the East bank of the Canal towards Aymeries. This they followed up by sending more troops in this direction with the idea of turning Aulnoye from the North.

During the whole morning the enemy had continuously and heavily barraged the line of the Sambre, which prevented any advance. Owing to the civilian population known to be in Aulnoye, the employment of artillery fire on the village to assist the troops in its capture was not permitted. If it had not been for this restriction the advance would have been made much earlier in the day. As it was, it was not until noon that the enemy fire died down and an advance could be made. By 12.45 p.m. the 6th Leicesters had occupied Aulnoye and the 1st Wilts. were advancing with them on the right. By 6 p.m. the final objective, the line of the road East of Aulnoye

and Aymeries from Les Quatre Bras through Etrée to the Sambre, had been captured, and touch had been established with the 33rd Division on the right although not with the 5th Division on the North, who should have joined up at the bridge South of Pont sur Sambre.

All through the previous night and during the next day the rain had been heavy and continuous, which combined with the desperate fighting during the day made the lot of the front line troops very trying and uncomfortable. In spite of the weariness of the men, orders were received for the advance to be continued the following morning (7th), and accordingly at dawn the 7th Leicesters and 1st Wilts. moved forward under an artillery barrage and occupied the high ground West of Limont Fontaine. Little opposition was met with during this advance towards the Maubeuge Road. Brigade Headquarters had meanwhile advanced firstly to Aulnoye Brewery at 7.30 a.m. and later, at about 9 a.m., to Etrée, being received everywhere with open arms by the inhabitants who were crazy with

joy at being free once more. Flowers and everything they had—mostly coffee—were pressed on the troops, and flags sprang out everywhere like mushrooms in a night. Touch with the 33rd Division was still maintained on the right, but the 5th Division had only been able to make good the line of railway East of Pont sur Sambre. A defensive flank was therefore thrown back by the 7th Leicesters across the high ground facing North, to guard this flank as a temporary measure until the 5th Division was able to get into the line. Meanwhile the 64th Brigade, after some hard fighting, had been checked on the Eastern limits of Limont Fontaine, and it was not till about 5 p.m. that they finally took this and advanced to a line about 500 yards West of the Maubeuge Road.

During the night 7th/8th the 17th Division came through to continue the advance, whereupon the 110th Brigade withdrew to billets in Berlaimont. Brigade Headquarters were billeted at the home of an old French military surgeon, who had fought in the war of 1870, a charming old gentleman who did everything

he could to make his self-invited guests comfortable. In the course of conversation he told the Brigadier a curious story, which he himself thoroughly believed and vouched for. He said that after the retreat in 1914, about 400 British soldiers with a proportion of officers were cut off and remained hidden in the Forêt de Mormal. Here they remained for eight months, living partly on what they could catch in the way of game, and partly on what the villagers could send them secretly. The country people, he said, were very much struck with the discipline which was still maintained, the men turning out spotless, with their rifles and accoutrements clean and always ready for use. Eventually the Germans somehow discovered their whereabouts and organised a search through the Forest. Apparently, from what he gathered, a large number were killed and the remainder captured. It would be interesting to know what truth there is in this extraordinary story; owing to the extent and density of the forest in those days it seems probable the men could have remained hidden in the depths; but eight months seems a long

time for such a secret to have been kept, no matter how carefully guarded.¹ Latterly of course the Germans felled a large portion of the forest for timber, and it is now no longer what it used to be.

The Division remained at Berlaimont and its vicinity till the 11th, when orders were received for the cessation of hostilities from 11 a.m. that day. The news was received with a certain amount of pleasure, but, strange as it may seem, not wholly with delight. From evidence which was apparent on every hand, the enemy's retreat had become in the last three or four days more and more of a precipitate flight. It was known, too, that a big offensive was due to start from near St. Mihiel Northwards which, if successful, as there was little doubt it would be, would have had the effect of cutting in on the enemy's line of retreat Eastwards. This with their front badly broken, as it was in front of the 4th, 3rd and 1st Armies, would have meant a serious débâcle and a crushing defeat to the enemy. Further advance would of course have been a very

¹ See Appendix 2.

difficult problem owing to the difficulties of transport, but every one would have gladly gone on on half rations to finish the job properly.

On the 11th the 110th Brigade marched to Beaufort, while a squadron of the North Irish Horse on bicycles formed an outpost screen beyond, with Headquarters at Croisies. Here they remained till December 14, and employed the time in training and reorganisation in preparation for any further move which might be necessary. Sports of all kinds were organised and everything done to keep the troops happy and fit. On November 18 the Brigadier at last got his long-deferred leave and this time, instead of being recalled, he was agreeably surprised by being given a week's extension.

The trip from Beaufort to Boulogne, carried out by motor-car, was a most interesting one, the route being by Valenciennes, Lille, Arras, through the devastated and familiar area to Bailleul and thence, via St. Omer, to Boulogne. Bailleul, which the Brigadier remembered five months before as quite a charming little town, comparatively intact, with a particularly comfortable Officers' Club just off the principal

square, was now merely a rubbish-heap, knocked absolutely flat. Shortly after the Brigadier returned from leave, the Division moved back to an area near Amiens, in the Somme Valley. The 110th Brigade marched on December 14 by stages to Inchy, where they were transported in motor buses to Bevelles, arriving there about December 17, just in time to make necessary preparations for Christmas.

There had been little scope for tactical manœuvring during these last three months. Big movements were certainly made, but they appertained more to strategy than to tactics, and the rôle of the fighting troops could hardly be called Open Warfare as flanks were still, in the big sense, "un-get-at-able". Trench systems such as the Hindenburg and Masnières Line were still in being and were held, but it was possible from time to time to introduce a certain amount of tactical manœuvres into these operations, such as the taking of Beaulencourt and the Masnières Line, which showed what can be done by such flank movements, especially when they introduce that element of surprise which produces effects out of all pro-

portion to its intrinsic value. The chief lesson learnt during these times was in the co-operation of the Field Artillery with the infantry. In long advances the infantry very soon got beyond the support of the Heavy Artillery and depended entirely on the lighter arm for support. Undoubtedly the Field Artillery, long accustomed as they had been to the system of barrages—so essential in an attack on a limited objective—were somewhat at sea and rather “sticky” when confronted with the problem of supporting infantry in the open. They very quickly adapted themselves to the changed conditions, at first adopting the principle of attaching sections to the forward battalions with excellent results; but this savoured of a makeshift. This principle of pushing guns forward to support the infantry would have been sounder and more in accordance with the Field Artillery training if it had been applied to complete batteries and even to Brigades. Indirect fire could still have been employed where necessary, and fire brought to bear over open sights when opportunity offered. Some portion of the guns in an advance of this kind

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should be far enough forward to be able to take advantage of opportunities, which may be fleeting ones, for energetically supporting the infantry. The machine guns during this period had made great strides. Their tactical handling was getting more and more understood ; they were no longer tied to the apron-strings of the Brigadier or Battalion Commander, but were given a definite place in the general scheme and allowed to carry out their rôle without being hampered or fettered with unnecessary orders and instructions. Their chief *raison d'être* is to support the infantry whole-heartedly and to the last man and gun, and it was now clearly understood that this support could be obtained, not *with* the infantry, but by pursuing their own tactics *for* the infantry. Here again close support is essential, and this was obtained by the principles of echelonning in depth and continuous leap-frogging in the advance. Their performance was excellent but, to be hypercritical, it seemed that freer and better use of limbers might have improved it.

The years 1917-1918 will never be forgotten by the writer. They were a priceless experi-

ence of war in nearly all its phases and, through it all, the chief thing which remains in his mind is a deep and ineffaceable admiration for the men who really won it, the bed-rock of the fighting line—the imperturbable British Infantryman.

In February of the following year the Brigadier took over command of the Division from Major-General Sir David Campbell, who went to another command, much to the regret of everybody. No further move was made, the Brigadier remaining in command of the Division till it was gradually demobilised and finally ceased to exist early in May.

As the Brigade gradually melted away in the fierce heat of demobilisation, the Brigadier felt many a pang in seeing the departure of the men in whom he took such a pride and who had fought so long and so well under his command. What splendid men they were! No one who was not actually there with them can have any idea of what they went through, especially during the last three months. During that last period there was practically no rest for them. Weary and footsore they never

faltered or gave way. It was their proud boast that, during that time, they never failed to obtain their objective and never lost what they won. Truly a command to be proud of, and the Brigadier saw them go with reluctance and grief. Such men are beyond all price, and so long as England produces them and sees that they are looked after in the right way and that their spirit of self-sacrifice and devotion to duty is fostered and encouraged to the highest possible degree, she need have no fear of any diminution in the National Spirit which is the right and heritage of her sons. One was reminded of those stirring lines in "The Shropshire Lad" :—

Yes, God will save her, fear you not,
 Be you the lads you've been—
 Get you the sons your fathers got,
 And God will save the Queen!

Appendix I

Mentions of the 21st Division in the Commander-in-Chief's Dispatches from January to October, 1918

March 24, 1918.

"During the first two days of the enemy's offensive South of Arras, the 21st Division maintained its position at EPEHY against all assaults and only withdrew from the village under orders when the progress made by the enemy to the South rendered such a course necessary. Before this Division withdrew it inflicted great loss on the enemy and the German Official reports acknowledge the bitterness of the fighting."

April 30, 1918.

"8.34 p.m. Following a bombardment of great intensity, the French and British positions from the neighbourhood of METEREN to ZILLEBEKE LAKE were violently attacked this morning by large hostile forces. Attacks were made also upon the Belgian positions North of YPRES.

"Fighting of great severity developed rapidly on the whole Allied front.

"The 25th, 49th and 21st British Divisions completely repulsed every attempt made by the enemy to enter their position, and despite the constant succession of determined attacks in great strength, maintained their line intact."

May 2, 1918.

"Please inform the G.O.C. and Officers and men of the 21st Division that the share taken by them in the recent fighting North

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of the Lys, following so closely upon their gallant action on the battle front South of Arras, reflects credit alike on their Division and upon the British Army. I thank them for the great courage and devotion they have already displayed and am confident that any further test which the future may bring will be met by them with the same unflinching resolution."

May 29, 1918.

"On our right the 21st Division in touch with our Allies held their battle positions throughout the day and successfully withstood the enemy's attempts to advance."

September 14, 1918.

"The 21st Division which on March 21 distinguished itself in the defence of EPEHY was in line opposite to BEAUCOURT on August 21, capturing BEAUCOURT. During the following days it advanced with great gallantry over the SOMME Battlefield, overcoming stiff resistance in the neighbourhood of LE SARS and BEAUCOURT L'ABBAYE."

September 19, 1918.

"North of PEIZIERE, the 21st Division attacked over the Northern position of the sector defended by it with so much gallantry on March 21 and 22. Having captured its old front trenches, together with the strong point known as VAUCELETTE FARM and beaten off a hostile counter-attack, it pushed forward more than a mile beyond this line, capturing several hundred prisoners and a German Battery complete with teams in the course of its advance."

October 9, 1918.

"In the centre, Welsh and English troops of the 38th and 21st Division broke through the German defence system known as the 'BEAUREVOIR-MASNIERES Line' and captured MALINCOURT and the trench line West of MALINCOURT. Obstinate resistance was met with from strong bodies of the enemy with M. Gs. in VILLERS OUTREAU. After a period of hard fighting, Welsh troops gained possession of the village."

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October 24, 1918.

“English troops of the 25th Division had hard fighting in BISHOP'S WOOD (East of LE CATEAU) and made good progress through it. East County troops of the 18th Division advancing to a depth of $8\frac{1}{2}$ miles captured BOUSIES. English and Scottish Battalions of the 21st and 23rd Divisions secured the crossings of the HARPIES at VENDEGIE WOOD and captured VENDEGIE Village.”

HEADQUARTERS, October 30, 1918.

Times, Monday, March 25, 1918.

THE FIFTY MILE BATTLE

On the right of Gauche Wood were other troops—namely Leicesters and Northumberland Fusiliers—from the height below Gauche Wood known as Chapel Hill to Pezière and Epéhy. Some three divisions and parts of a fourth were thrown against our one division. At one point only the enemy got into our line just round Vaucellette Farm where he was actually in our advanced posts in the fog before we saw him. Waves of Germans flowed past the farm and round it on both sides, but in the farm itself were a party of Leicesters who held out though completely surrounded, and fought, refusing to surrender until every man was either killed or so wounded that he could fight no more.

On the left of this bit of the line the Leicesters and Northumberland Fusiliers together held Chapel Hill against attacks which lasted throughout the day. On the right more Leicesters had Pezière in their keeping and here the same bloody struggle raged, immense numbers of Germans being killed and immense numbers more coming on. At one time the Germans forced their way into the village of Pezière by the use of the Flammenwerfer. Then we attacked with a couple of tanks and infantry and drove the enemy out again.

* * * * *

At the end of the day all this section of the front was intact, except where a small dent remained by Vaucelette Farm, and the men told me that they could have re-established even that one dent and “held on till 1920” if they had been allowed to

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stay and do it. But the troops on the right of Epéhy had been compelled to fall back and to conform to this that evening the line from Gouzeaucourt to Pezière also fell back.

The Germans had pushed us back nearly as far as St. Emilie so that our flank at Epéhy was exposed to a depth of some 2,000 yards.

Times, April 24.

“HEROIC BRITISH DIVISIONS”

Of the 21st Division's magnificent fighting at Epéhy and Pezière and by Chapel Hill I told in my dispatch of March 24 when Leicesters, Lincolns, and Northumberland Fusiliers all did so gallantly, and I spoke of it again in my message of April 4. The 21st has done very well in other battles in this war, as in the Wancourt-Henivel area in the battle of Arras last year and in the capture of the Reutel Ridge on October 4, 1917. Nothing could have been stouter than this fighting on the first days of this German offensive.

And again in *The Times* of May 29, in an article entitled “Battle on two Fronts.”

Appendix 2

Some three months after General Cumming had left the 91st Brigade an incident occurred which may be recorded here. At about 1.30 a.m. on the night August 6/7, 1917, No. 282046 Pte. B. Taylor, 2/4th London Regiment, crawled into the right post of the Brigade, which was still holding the Bullecourt sector. His battalion had taken part in an attack on June 15, and he, being disabled with a fractured thigh, had crawled with a friend into a disused shelter about 200 yards behind the enemy's front line. His companion could walk, and would go out after dark to procure iron-rations and water from the dead in the vicinity, and in this manner they lived for no less than seven weeks, until one night the companion failed to return. After twice failing, Taylor eventually succeeded in dragging himself across the enemy trenches and wire defences, and into our lines. For this remarkable feat he was subsequently awarded the D.C.M.

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